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from the longtime editor  
of the Mountain State's  
largest newspaper

the <sup>Charleston</sup> Gazette

James A.  
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— and some not wonderful —  
from the longtime editor  
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Front cover photo: **West Virginia's gold-covered Capitol dome is the state's most recognizable symbol — and it's lovely even at night, as seen in this view by Charleston Gazette photographer Lawrence Pierce.**

# Introduction

When I was born in 1932 — in a little Wetzel County farm town with no electricity or paved streets — the world's human population was about two billion. Now it has passed six billion, tripling in a single lifetime. America ballooned from 120 million to 300 million. Urbanization mushroomed. Growth has been stupendous.

But West Virginia, engulfed in the rugged Appalachians, didn't follow the national pattern. The Mountain State remained outside the swarm, not growing. In the 1940 census, West Virginia and Florida each had 1.9 million people. Today, West Virginia still has about 1.9 million, and Florida has 18 million. The jumbled mountain region stayed green and serene, far from the madding crowd, while America became a pressure cooker. I presume it's because tortuous highlands everywhere are harder to develop into urban sprawl, commerce centers and industrial complexes.

The gentle isolation makes life in the hills charming. West Virginians share a special bond with the twisting topography and closeness to nature. They're never far from a shadowy ravine, a woodland trail, a gurgling creek, a patch of wildflowers. Around every curve, they may meet a deer or raccoon. The haunting spirit of "country roads, take me home" is felt deeply.

As hurricanes wreck southern coasts, Mississippi Valley floods inundate millions, twisters shatter flat regions, and wildfires scorch California, with earthquake peril always present, our sheltering slopes and crests make this state a sanctuary.

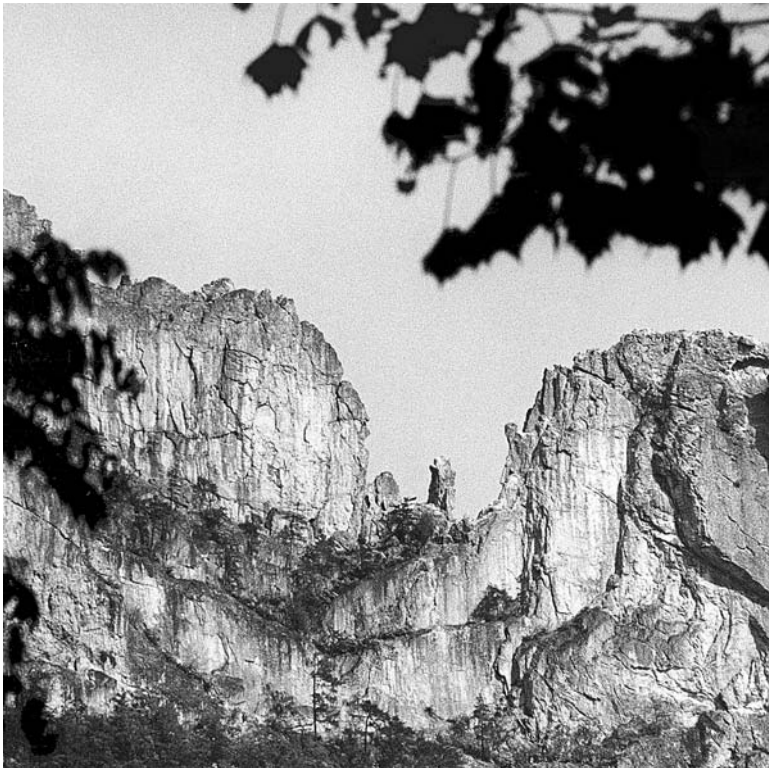
West Virginia has many tales, and I covered most of them in my half-century of writing for the state's largest newspaper, *The Charleston Gazette*, known for its

reform crusading. Episode after episode unfolded during my long tenure: Kanawha County's historic uprising against "godless textbooks," goofy "Mothman" and "Braxton County Monster" crazes, the notorious corruption of the Barron and Moore administrations, the Portuguese wine fraud, the United Mine Workers cleanup after the Yablonsky murders, the "pot plane" crash, a long battle over police payola, etc.

This book contains my *Gazette* columns on many facets of West Virginia life, plus historic look-backs, even to prehistoric time. It begins with ancient topics and moves forward to the present. In a sense, it follows my own life: growing up on a horse-operated West Virginia farm little different from the medieval era — and now working in a beehive of computers with satellite dishes on the *Gazette* roof, instantly flashing Mountain State events worldwide.

The book isn't a comprehensive chronicle of the whole West Virginia record. Instead, it contains capsules of fascinating episodes. We at the *Gazette* hope you enjoy it.

**James A. Haught, Editor**  
*The Charleston Gazette*  
Fall, 2008



Arnout Hyde photo from Gazette-Mail file

**Dramatic evidence of tectonic rupture is displayed by Seneca Rocks, a popular climbing site in Pendleton County. The formation consists of 250-foot-thick sedimentary rock that hardened flat in an ocean bed more than 400 million years ago — then was tipped upright by crumpling of eastern North America. Softer material eroded away, leaving this spectacle.**

# Great crush formed Appalachia

Immersed in mountains, West Virginians get a science lesson daily. All around us looms 300 million years of geology. It's clear evidence of the mammoth crumpling of Earth's crust, before the era of dinosaurs, followed by long eons of erosion.

Each time you drive through a highway cut, or look upward at a soaring cliff, or gaze down into a deep mountain gorge, you glimpse part of the planet's history. Trying to grasp the immense time periods that produced these spectacles can be overwhelming.

Sometimes it surprises me to realize that green mountains aren't as organic as they appear. They're simply colossal rocks, covered by an extremely thin skin of dirt and trees. In fact, mountains are harder rock that didn't wash away, while softer formations around them slowly eroded, leaving valleys.

Originally, gravity caused rock strata to be formed flat, layer upon layer, during vast eras. But some Appalachian rock today isn't flat. It twists upward at bizarre angles along exposed roadsides. When I see mountain layers tipped upright, I'm boggled by the incredible pressure that caused such a marvel.

The marvel stemmed from plate tectonics, once called "continental drift." Gargantuan granite and basalt segments of Earth's crust actually float on denser, pliable rock in the planet's mantle. The plates move ceaselessly, perhaps two to four inches a year, too slowly for humans to notice. Most scientists think the plate movement is impelled by heat currents in the plastic underlayer, and by gravity's downward pull



on mile-high new lava ridges in mid-ocean. A few think Earth's rotation and the moon's pull are factors.

A good geology book, *Landprints*, gives this account of the Appalachians:

The North American plate once was flat. More than 400 million years ago, eroding sand and pebbles bonded into immense layers of sedimentary rock near shorelines. Seashell debris mixed in to create sections of limestone. (When you enter a limestone cavern today, you're inside an ancient seabed.)

About 250 million years ago, tectonic movement gradually jammed the eastern edge of North America into western Africa and Europe as plates merged into a monster landmass called Pangea. The slow-moving collision had such force that plate edges ruptured and buckled. Who can grasp such a titanic concept as America's entire eastern border crumpling?

"It is hard to imagine deformation on so huge a scale," the book says. "Some folds were pushed completely over on their sides so that older layers lay over younger ones. The result was a mighty mountain range, largely built of sea-floor slabs.... Sheets of sedimentary rock on the Appalachian Plateau were shoved farther and farther west, some of them almost as far as the Ohio River."

Originally, the Appalachians were perhaps eight miles high, taller than the Himalayas, but eons of erosion wore them down to a mile or so.

After the mountain-building phase, mantle currents impelled plates of the Western Hemisphere away from Africa and Europe — and lava upwelled through a fault-line between them, creating the ever-spreading floor of the Atlantic Ocean. Inch by inch,



century by century, eon by eon, the spread became 3,000 miles of seabed. Today, lava still rises in mid-Atlantic as North America creeps westward at about the pace of hair or fingernail growth. Along the West Coast, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, the North American plate wedges atop the rotating Pacific plate. Over the past 170 million years, the USGS says, this collision created the continent's western mountains, presumably buckling the Rockies far inland.

It's awesome to contemplate something so vast as North America relentlessly moving and reshaping the planet, too imperceptibly to notice.

But part of the tale can be seen in many Appalachian hillsides. Creation of interstate highways and Appalachian Corridors required excavations that turned mountains into geology displays. Every schoolchild can see rock layers that took millions of lifetimes to form, then more millions of lifetimes to twist out of shape.

West Virginia has many such displays. But the grandest in this region is just across the state line in western Maryland about five miles northwest of Berkeley Springs. It's the Sideling Hill cut on I-68.

Slicing through the mountain exposed a U-shaped rock fold called a syncline. The 340-foot-high spectacle is so intriguing that visitor centers were built on both sides of the freeway to let travelers gaze at the wonder.

Amid today's endless distractions of politics, warfare and other hassles of daily life, it's good for people to stop and ponder a reality that grew a quarter-billion years before humans evolved.

*(Published May 25, 2008)*



Gazette-Mail file photo

**South Charleston's Adena mound is the second-largest in West Virginia. The Kanawha Valley once contained about 100 of the prehistoric burial domes, but most were removed by development.**

# From mastodons to multiplexes

A few years ago, a Dutch exchange student stayed at my home and attended Nitro High School. He said his school in Holland was a former monastery built in the 1600s, and that he occasionally walked past the house where Rembrandt was born. It made Charleston seem rootless by comparison.

However, fascinating history surrounds us in the Kanawha Valley, even though it isn't as visible as monasteries and 1606 homes. It's enchanting, if you take time to learn it.

Grasping the past makes you look differently at the streets and hills and streams. To foster that way of looking, here's a thumbnail chronicle of the valley, gleaned from several histories:

In ancient geologic time, the river veered south toward what is now Huntington, then crossed Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. The name Teays River applies to that route. Glaciers of the Ice Age dammed it near Chillicothe, making a 200-mile lake which eventually spilled into new paths: the modern lower Kanawha and Ohio valleys.

Paleo Indians came into the Kanawha Valley about 12,000 years ago to hunt mammoths and mastodons, according to *The Historian* magazine. The elephantlike beasts died out about 6000 B.C. The hunters also lived on buffalo herds, which remained in the valley until the early 1800s.

So-called Archaic Indians occupied villages at St. Albans and Buffalo from roughly 7000 B.C. to 2000

B.C. Then came mound-building Indians (1000 B.C. to A.D. 700) who left about 100 burial domes in the Kanawha Valley and many others around the state. America's largest such creation is the Grave Creek Mound at Moundsville — 62 feet high, 240 feet across, containing 60,000 tons of earth hand-carried by prehistoric diggers who lacked metal tools or containers. The mound-builders are called Adena People because a major mound existed at Adena, the estate of an Ohio governor near Chillicothe.

All these people evidently became modern Indian tribes such as the Shawnees.

The first whites to see the Kanawha Valley were explorers, traders — and prisoners. Gabriel Arthur, as an Indian hostage, was brought to the site of St. Albans in 1673. John Salley floated down Coal River in a buffalo-skin boat in 1742. The first to see the site of Charleston were Mary Ingles, her three children and her sister-in-law, who had been captured by Shawnees in a gory 1755 raid at Blacksburg, Va. The pregnant Ingles delivered her baby during the forced march down the valley to Ohio. Her subsequent escape and 40-day return flight back up the Kanawha are the stuff of legend.

In other parts of West Virginia, white settlers cleared forest and made farms at least a generation before the Kanawha Valley was colonized. For example, the South Branch of the Potomac River was opened in the 1740s. (I learned this during a family-tree search. Records in the State Archives say Haughts came from Holland in 1751, bought indentured servants off the ship, married them, joined other settlers in the South Branch Valley near

Moorefield, then spread to the Morgantown area.)

In the Kanawha Valley, Simon Kenton and fellow hunters built a camp at the mouth of Elk River in 1771, but Indians killed one of his party and the others fled. George Washington led a survey team down the Ohio River and partway up the Kanawha in 1772. The first settler farm was cleared at Cedar Grove in 1773, but Indians killed the farmer.

To curb the Indian danger, Virginia colonists and British authorities formed a militia and marched into Shawnee territory.

Gen. Andrew Lewis led 1,000 armed men down the Kanawha Valley. The British governor, Lord Dunmore, led another contingent to Pittsburgh and down the Ohio. (Three Haughts and an indentured son-in-law were in Dunmore's brigade.) The two groups planned to unite where the rivers meet (now Point Pleasant), but the Lewis column arrived first, was attacked by hundreds of Shawnee braves, and massacred them. The Battle of Point Pleasant (Oct. 10, 1774) forced the Indians to sign a brief truce.

Some historians contend that Dunmore deliberately delayed his march, hoping that Lewis would be defeated, which would make Virginians want protection from British Redcoats, causing them to forget their growing mutiny against England. Thus the Point Pleasant victory is called the first battle of the American Revolution.

The Revolution consumed the attention of most colonists, but a few began trickling into the Kanawha Valley. Forts were built at the future sites of Point Pleasant and St. Albans. (In 1777, the Shawnee chief, Cornstalk, came to warn occupants of the

Point Pleasant fort of an impending Indian attack. They imprisoned him and killed him.

In 1788, George Clendenin and 30 men arrived at the mouth of Elk River and built a fort — the first step in creating Charleston. At the same time, Daniel Boone and his wife built a log cabin in what is now Kanawha City, and adopted a girl whose parents had been killed by Indians at Cabin Creek. More settlers arrived.

Kanawha County was established by the Virginia legislature in 1789.

Boone was elected a legislator, and walked all the way to Richmond to take his seat.

The last valley resident killed by Indians was Shadrack Harriman, felled in 1791 near the present site of the University of Charleston.

Salt brine pooled in the valley east of Charleston, and settlers began evaporating it. Selling salt became the first industry.

Brine wells were drilled. First wood, then coal from outcroppings, was burned to heat evaporating kettles. The War of 1812 blocked salt imports to the East Coast, causing a Kanawha boom. Soon, hundreds of workers were manning 52 furnaces, producing three million bushels of salt a year. Two hundred coopers made barrels to hold it. Fifteen sawmills along Elk River made lumber for flatboats to carry it downriver. Many of Charleston's First Families grew rich from salt. Shepherd College historian John Stealey wrote a book on the industry (*The Antebellum Kanawha Salt Business and Western Markets*, University Press of Kentucky). One ugly chapter tells how thousands of slaves were brought

to the valley to man the salt works and dig coal for the furnaces. Most of them were “rented” to salt firms by their owners. Some were killed in mine accidents, some died of cholera, some escaped to Ohio. In the 1850 census, Kanawha County had 12,001 white residents and 3,140 slaves. The slaves became a permanent black community at Malden — the most famous resident being Booker T. Washington, who rose from illiteracy after the Civil War to become America’s premier black educator.

These are a few nuggets from the valley’s history lode. Thousands more are in books such as Stan Cohen’s superb *Kanawha County Images*, published in 1988 for Charleston’s bicentennial.

This region has seen it all, from mastodons and mound-builders to multiplex theaters and MasterCard shopping.

Awareness of the past changes your perspective. Currently, valley residents are absorbed by the lottery scandal and the county school levy defeat — but remember, they’re just the latest in 12,000 years of human hassles in the Kanawha Valley.

*(Published Sept. 28, 1993)*





West Virginia State Archives image from *Life and Adventures of Lewis Wetzel, the Virginia Ranger*, by Cecil B. Hartley, Philadelphia: G.G. Evans

**This engraving from an 1859 book shows “Deathwind” Wetzel waging his one-man war against Indians.**

# The land of Deathwind

Well, I attended the yearly Shortline Reunion in Wetzel County — home of Lewis Wetzel Park, Lewis Wetzel Wildlife Management Area, Lewis Wetzel Personal Care Center, etc. — and it struck me that my boyhood home probably is the only county in America named for a deadly killer who hunted humans, stalking them like prey.

Lewis Wetzel, called “Deathwind,” was a hero to pioneer Ohio Valley settlers in the late 1700s because he exterminated raiding Indians and brought back their scalps. Later in life, he became controversial, seen by some as a madman. Regardless, he holds a solid spot in West Virginia’s history.

The State Archives at the Cultural Center has a dozen books and historical treatises about him, and several others have been written. Western novelist Zane Grey — a descendant of Zanes who helped found Wheeling and Zanesville, Ohio — made the dark, silent Wetzel a central figure in three books: *Betty Zane*, *The Spirit of the Border* and *The Last Trail*. From several of these sources, I gleaned this account:

Wetzel’s father came from southwest Germany as an indentured servant and married a military captain’s daughter, with whom he had seven children as they lived on farms in colonial Virginia and Pennsylvania.

In 1768, the Iroquois signed a treaty with British

governors giving whites all land east of the Ohio River as far south as the Kanawha. However, the land wasn't occupied by the Iroquois, but by Shawnee, Miami and Delaware clans, who didn't want to surrender their homeland.

Settler families rushed to get free land under the treaty. The Wetzels carved out a farm on Big Wheeling Creek about 14 miles from the Ohio. But the newcomers suffered frequent Indian attacks. Frontier families learned to fight to survive.

When Lewis was 13, Indians raided his farm, wounded him with a bullet that grazed his chest, and hauled him and a younger brother into captivity, swimming the Ohio to Indian territory. On the third night, the captors relaxed their guard, and the boys sneaked barefoot out of the camp. Lewis sneaked back to steal moccasins drying by a fire, then sneaked back again to retrieve his father's flintlock and powder, which had been taken in the raid. Upon their return to the settlement, they were hailed as heroes.

The following year, Lewis helped a neighbor pursue and kill four Indians who had abducted the neighbor's wife. They returned with four scalps and the unhurt wife. This tale was recounted in an 1850 book, *The Forest Rose*.

Two years later, Wetzel joined a posse of settlers who went into Ohio to recover stolen horses. Eventually, the others quit the chase, leaving the 16-year-old to face the Indians alone. By this time, the muscular youth had developed combat skills. He waggled his hat from behind a tree, and when Indians fired, he pretended to fall dead. As the

Indians approached, he rose suddenly and shot the nearest. Then he fled, reloading the flintlock on the run — an extremely difficult feat — and whirled and shot the next pursuer. The others ran off. Wetzel returned to the settlement with two scalps and the lost horses.

Apparently, the young man made a vow to spend the rest of his life killing Indians. Historian James Pierce wrote in *The Early America Review* (spring 1997):

“From then on, Lewis Wetzel lived primarily as an Indian hunter. He never ‘settled down.’ He never took up land, built a cabin of his own, farmed, or did any other sort of usual work. There’s no record of him ever forming a permanent relationship with a woman. They said he was a good fiddle player who was always welcome in taverns and at dances. He got along well with dogs and children, but not so much so with adults. ...

“Mainly, he roamed the forests across in the Ohio country hunting Indians and carrying out one-man raids. ... Between 1779 and 1788, he collected the scalps of 27 Indians that he said he personally killed. Accounts of his exploits as told by others put the total at more than 100.”

Some tribes called him “Deathwind,” a lethal force flowing silently through the forest.

Wetzel served as a guide for land speculators venturing into unsafe regions. “Indians killed John Madison, brother of future president James Madison, in the spring of 1786 while he was traveling with Wetzel on a land surveying expedition along the Little Kanawha River in today’s West Virginia,” Pierce

wrote. He continued:

“As the years passed, Wetzel became more and more eccentric. He took to wearing tassels in his split earlobes. His carefully tended hair, when combed out, hung almost to his knees. He said he wanted to give his enemies a scalp worth the effort it would take to get it. Indian fighting became the sole focus of his life. People became even more uncomfortable with him; they began to doubt his sanity.”

As the Revolution ravaged the eastern seaboard, Wetzel ravaged Indians inland. He bitterly opposed efforts to negotiate peace treaties with the natives, because he wanted to destroy them all. Twice, he killed peace emissaries arriving for negotiations. In 1781, he tomahawked a Delaware chief from behind as he stepped from his canoe, after being promised safe conduct to a discussion. Militia leaders hated Indians so fiercely that they did nothing to punish this coldblooded murder.

The second emissary killing happened in 1788, disrupting a treaty. A militia general charged Wetzel with murder, and he became a fugitive. He was captured on an island near Marietta, but escaped. Then he was captured again in Kentucky and held at a fort — but frontiersmen, including the legendary Simon Kenton, mobbed the fort and demanded his release. He was turned loose.

Deathwind went to Spanish New Orleans, where he was sentenced in the 1790s to two years in prison for counterfeiting. Some romantics say the real reason for this punishment was his involvement with a Spanish colonial officer's wife. As with many Lewis Wetzel tales, the truth is hazy.

In 1804, some reports say Wetzel joined the Lewis & Clark expedition for three months, but no record confirms it. He eventually went to a cousin's farm in Mississippi, where he died in 1808, presumably about 45 years old. In 1942, a researcher found his grave, and his remains were moved to a Northern Panhandle cemetery two miles from the old Wetzel homestead.

My home county was named for the Indian killer in 1846. I'm not sure whether I'm proud of it or ashamed of it. One of my ancestors, Tobias Haught, was killed and scalped near Morgantown in 1783, but none of my family became vengeful killers tracking down Indians.

I suppose it's impossible to apply today's moral judgments to the horrible, deadly times of the frontier. Whether we approve or disapprove, Lewis Wetzel is firmly locked into West Virginia's history.

*(Published Oct. 6, 2003)*





James Haught photo

**Little noticed, beside Barron Drive at the state Rehabilitation Center, are the side-by-side graves of a fiery plantation owner and his beloved slave woman, whose 13 children created Institute.**



# Institute rose from epic love story

Did you ever wonder why the largest African-American town in West Virginia happens to be located on Kanawha River nine miles west of Charleston?

The reason is one of the most remarkable love stories in the state's history.

A rich plantation owner chose one of his slaves for his lifelong mate, had 13 children by her, and finally was killed by angry white neighbors — but not before he took elaborate legal steps to guarantee that his black woman and brown children would inherit all his money and land.

They did, and the former slave plantation eventually turned into the academic community of Institute.

Strangely, the story isn't recorded in any West Virginia history book, even though it was a minor sensation at the end of the Civil War.

Skimpy bits of the tale can be found in century-old handwritten records filed away in the chambers of the Kanawha County clerk and circuit clerk.

The central figure was Samuel I. Cabell, a wealthy pioneer with a strong will and a strong temper. One record in the courthouse says he was born in Georgia; some descendants say family stories indicate he was born in England. Wherever he came from, there's little doubt he was part of the powerful Cabell family of Virginia that produced generals, congressmen, a governor and countless judges and bankers. Cabell County is named for the Virginia governor.

One hearsay family account says Samuel Cabell acquired many slaves in tideland Virginia, crossed over the mountains to the Kanawha Valley, and worked his slaves for a while in pioneer salt operations.

One of his slaves was Mary Barnes, apparently a young black woman of some physical charm. In the manner of many slaveholders, Cabell took her for his own and began fathering mulatto children.

But unlike other slaveowners, he didn't merely use her as one slave bedmate among many, and then ignore both her and the children that resulted. Instead, he evidently became devoted to her, remained loyal to her all his life, accepted her children proudly, and went to great lengths to guarantee that they had full legal rights as his sons and daughters.

He wrote four different wills to protect his dark-skinned family, and also filed papers setting each member free from slavery. All five documents remain today in aged yellow books at the courthouse, written in the ornate script of a court scrivener.

The earliest will is dated Nov. 24, 1851. It says Cabell had no real estate at that time, so he apparently was living somewhere in Kanawha County and using his slaves in industrial work.

The will provided that all his slaves were to be hired out for work for six years after his death, then set free. All, that is, except one select group:

"...My woman, Mary Barnes, together with all her children... I do hereby give their freedom to take effect immediately at my death, and they aren't to be considered as included among the slaves before-

mentioned....”

He ordered all his personal wealth, and all the money earned by hiring out his other slaves, to be divided among Mary and her children.

The next record in the courthouse is a property deed dated April 8, 1853, showing that Cabell paid \$10,500 for 967 acres of rich Kanawha River bottom-land encompassing everything between what is now West Dunbar and Sattes. (It was part of a tract once granted to George Washington by the king of England, then regranted to Washington by the governor of Virginia after the Revolution, then left to Martha Washington after George’s death, and finally divided among various inheritors.)

Cabell moved his Negro mate and children and his slaves to his new land and began a plantation.

The next record is the patriarch’s second will, dated April 6, 1858. It seems to imply he was worried he might be killed, and that Mary and the children might be sold into slavery if he were. The will begins:

“In the event of sudden demise, this instrument of writing is intended to show or make known that Mary Barnes and all her children — namely, Elizabeth, Sam, Lucy, Mary Jane, Sidney Ann, Soula, Eunice, Alice, Marina (or Bobby), Braxton, and an infant not named — are and always have been free, as I have every right to believe they are my children. I want and it is my will that they shall be educated out of... all the moneys, bonds, debts due me, land, stocks, farming utensils and household to be equally divided between them.”

Five months later, in a county deed book (slaves were property, remember) it is recorded that Cabell

officially set free Mary and the 11 children. The infant had been named Betty by then. (Two more sons, William Clifford and James B., eventually were born.)

Next, still another will was written May 9, 1859. In it Cabell repeated his earlier wishes and spelled out individual cash awards ranging from \$2,000 to \$3,500 which he wanted bestowed on each child. Some of the daughters had married by this time.

Finally, on Sept. 12, 1863 — during the Civil War — the plantation owner wrote an angry codicil saying:

“I hereby revoke this testament and will as to the slave portion. Those that have absconded and those taken away by the Federal Army shall not receive anything and they shall never be released from bondage during their lives. All property and moneys and debts due me shall be given to Mary Barnes and children equally after paying the board and schooling of the six youngest until they arrive of age.”

The old man’s temper, or his unusual marital status, or something, apparently drew him into conflict with white residents of the valley. In the aged records of Kanawha County Circuit Court, it’s written that Cabell was indicted April 5, 1864, on a charge of “intimidating a public officer.” But he was released upon pledging to be peaceable thereafter.

The next county record is a single line in a death book:

“(Name) Samuel I. Cabell, (date of death) July 18, 1865, (location) Kanawha River, (cause) murdered, (age) about 60, (parents) —, (place of birth) Georgia, (consort) —, (occupation) farmer.”

A weekly Charleston newspaper of that day, the

*West Virginia Journal*, was a fiery abolitionist sheet that regularly devoted its front page to poetry, sermons and demands for the hanging of all “rebel conspirators” such as “the arch-traitor, Robert E. Lee.” On page 3 of its July 26, 1865, issue (as recorded on microfilm in the State Department of Archives and History), it reported:

“THE KILLING OF SAMUEL I. CABELL

“The community here was thrown into considerable excitement on last Thursday evening, by the report of the death of Samuel I. Cabell, a bitter and open rebel who lived some nine miles below Charleston.

“Seven have been arrested. Their names are Allen Spradling, Andrew Jackson Spradling, Mark L. Spradling, Stark B. Whittington, Lawrence Whittington, William Whittington and Christopher Williams.

“The rumors of the causes leading to this crime are so contradictory that it is impossible to give any reliable statement of the facts; but if, as the friends of the deceased maintain, the act was a premeditated murder, the guilty party should be punished to the full extent of the law. We have always held up the law as the true guide, and nothing can justify its violation.

“On the other hand, it is held by friends of the prisoners that they had been subjects of repeated insults on account of their loyalty to the Union, and that they went to his house for the purpose of telling him they would put up with them no longer, when, getting excited, Cabell jumped over the fence flourishing his knife, and he was shot in self-defense.

“We can express no opinion, however, until the

evidence is revealed.”

Unfortunately, the evidence never is revealed — not in any remaining public record. In its next issue, the *Journal* gave no facts, only polemics:

“...It was established, we believe, that it wasn’t a premeditated murder. The charge that the ‘Union League’ is responsible for Cabell’s death contains about as much truth as that the Union men of this country are ‘blood-thirsty,’ etc. The society spoken of is distinctly a UNION society. Its purposes are LAW-FUL and its members LAW-ABIDING.”

Later editions merely report that all seven defendants were acquitted, by juries that deliberated only a few minutes in each case. Official records in the circuit clerk’s office report simply that the accused men were found innocent.

Folklore around Institute says Cabell was killed because of white resentment toward his integrated family life. But there’s no record to confirm it.

It’s possible that the white community may not even have been aware of Cabell’s personal life — he may have appeared to be only a bachelor farmer living with his slave workers — because the wills which claim Mary and the children weren’t brought to the courthouse and filed until after his death.

In December, 1865, Kanawha County commissioners ruled that the wills were valid. (Folklore says white relatives of Cabell tried to break the wills, but no court record shows it. There’s no mention of it in circuit court or State Supreme Court records, and the county commissioner records for that period are missing.)

At this point, another rich, white Cabell enters the

records. Charleston banker-farmer-salt manufacturer Napoleon Bonaparte Cabell, founder of an influential Kanawha Valley family, was named legal guardian for the youngest six of Samuel Cabell's mulatto children. Descendants say Napoleon was either Samuel's brother or his cousin — exact family records have been lost. Neither man is listed in the famous family's genealogy, a thick volume titled *The Cabells and Their Kin*.

(Napoleon Cabell apparently was as fiery as Samuel. Napoleon died in 1889, and his will in the county records is a ferocious one. He disinherited two daughters who married against his wishes, calling one of the sons-in-law “no better than a thief.... He swindled me out of about \$2,000.” As for his wife, Napoleon recorded that she “never brought a far-thing along” when he married her.)

Other county records tell the rest of the story.

In 1869, Mary Barnes petitioned the county commissioners to change her and her children's name to Cabell. In 1870, the commissioners divided the Cabell land among the mother and children, giving each a strip from the river to the hill. In 1871, executors reported that the Cabell estate was worth \$42,128 — a considerable fortune a century ago, equivalent to perhaps a million dollars today.

Before he was killed, Samuel Cabell had striven to give his children the best possible education. There were no schools for blacks in West Virginia, so he sent them to a private academy in Ohio. The practice continued after his death, and the youngsters grew to be an 1870s rarity: educated, professional-class African-Americans. Some were doctors, some



became teachers.

Some of the children settled in other states. Some returned to the family homestead in Kanawha County. Those who remained here became leaders among the growing number of residents as the plantation gradually evolved into a town.

The community was called, at different times, “Cabell Farm” and “Piney Grove.” It was one of the few places where freed slaves could live in peace. Even though West Virginia was a Union state, many white residents of the valley despised blacks. The 1870s newspapers tell of harassment such as beatings by mobs and petitions seeking to ban ex-slaves from the county.

In 1890, Congress passed a law saying certain benefits would be denied to states that didn’t educate African-Americans — so, in 1891, the West Virginia Legislature passed an act creating the “West Virginia Colored Institute.” A site was sought, but several communities, including St. Albans, angrily rejected offers to become the home of the black institution.

Finally, according to John C. Harlan’s *History of West Virginia State College*, Gov. Aretas B. Fleming and his staff boarded a boat and chugged down Kanawha River looking for a site. At the colony nine miles downriver, they were met by black residents who welcomed the idea.

Samuel Cabell’s daughter Marina sold the state a 30-acre tract for \$2,250, and other lots gradually were purchased until an 80-acre campus was acquired. (Marina became postmaster of the town, and was said to be the first woman of color in the

United States to hold such a position.)

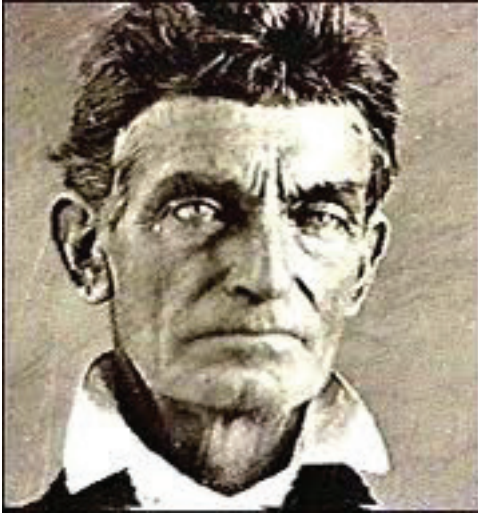
The town was named Institute, and kept the name even though the “Colored Institute” later had other labels and finally evolved into West Virginia State University.

Mary Barnes Cabell died in 1900, an 85-year-old great-grandmother revered by her clan. She was buried in a little family cemetery alongside her slain mate. His tombstone, already weathered by then, indicates he was 63 years old when he was killed, and it spells his name “Cabble,” one of the pre-Civil War variants of the name. Two of their daughters are buried in the same cemetery.

Today’s Institute is a jam-packed academic and industrial center. In addition to the college, it has the Carbide chemical plant, the dormant Goodrich-Gulf plant, the state vocational rehabilitation center, the state police training academy, and a couple of hundred homes that have become racially integrated with scattered white occupants.

Hardly noticed in the bustle is the final refuge of the two people who started it all. The little Cabell Cemetery has been surrounded by buildings and driveways of the vocational rehabilitation center. A lone tree bends over the graves of the murdered plantation owner and his beloved former slave woman.

*(Published Feb. 8, 1970, then read at the annual meeting of the West Virginia State Historical Society and reprinted in the society’s quarterly journal.)*



Brown had the fiery eyes of a True Believer. (Portrait in 1859)

## John Brown's raid

A gory 1859 West Virginia event helped trigger America's worst tragedy, the Civil War (and almost started it two years before it actually began).

John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry -- at the tip of the Eastern Panhandle, at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers -- inflamed American passions over slavery, intensifying the gulf between supporters and opponents, hastening war between the north and south.

Here's the saga:

Brown was a bitter zealot, a morality crusader whose noble opposition to human bondage spurred him to ignoble killing. He lived in several states: Connecticut, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Kansas, etc. He and his sons helped runaway slaves escape northward through the Underground Railroad. He attended abolition meetings and pledged to spend his life fighting slavery. He met repeatedly with Frederick Douglass and other emancipation advocates. Douglass tried to persuade Brown to shun violence, to no avail.

In 1855, Brown went to Kansas, where slavery supporters and opponents were polarized into deadly militias. In 1856, pro-slavery vigilantes raided the "free state" town of Lawrence,

killing two men, burning buildings and smashing newspaper presses. Two nights later, Brown and his sons and supporters counterattacked at Pottawatomie, dragging five slavery supporters from their homes and hacking them to death with swords. (The silent weapons were used to avoid waking the sleeping town.)

Several Kansas battles followed. At Osawatomie, five of Brown's men were killed, including one of his sons. The whole town was burned.

Brown developed a vision of leading an army of abolitionists and freed slaves in guerrilla warfare, to kill Southern forces and plantation owners until they were forced to stop using humans like livestock. To arm his rebellion, he decided to loot a federal gun factory and munitions arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

Growing a beard for disguise and using a fake name, he rented an isolated farm where his followers assembled, one by one, clandestinely. On the night of Oct. 16, 1859, Brown and about 20 men poured into Harpers Ferry, seized bridges, broke through gates and took control of the arsenal. Several townspeople were shot in the streets. Ironically, the first killed was a freed slave living in Harpers Ferry.

From a nearby farm, Brown's followers kidnapped Col. Lewis Washington and took two prized possessions: an engraved sword that Frederick the Great had given to his great-grand-uncle, George Washington, and a pair of pistols given to George Washington by the Marquis de LaFayette. The great-grand-nephew and some townspeople were held as hostages for protection during the weapons raid.

Brown had assumed that slaves from Shenandoah Valley plantations and devoted abolitionists would rush to join his rebellion. But it didn't happen. Instead, surrounding residents grabbed guns and fought back, trapping the insurrectionists inside the armory. Ten raiders were killed, and more wounded. A brutal siege occurred until federal troops arrived. Then soldiers stormed the arsenal, capturing survivors among the rebels. The hostages were freed.

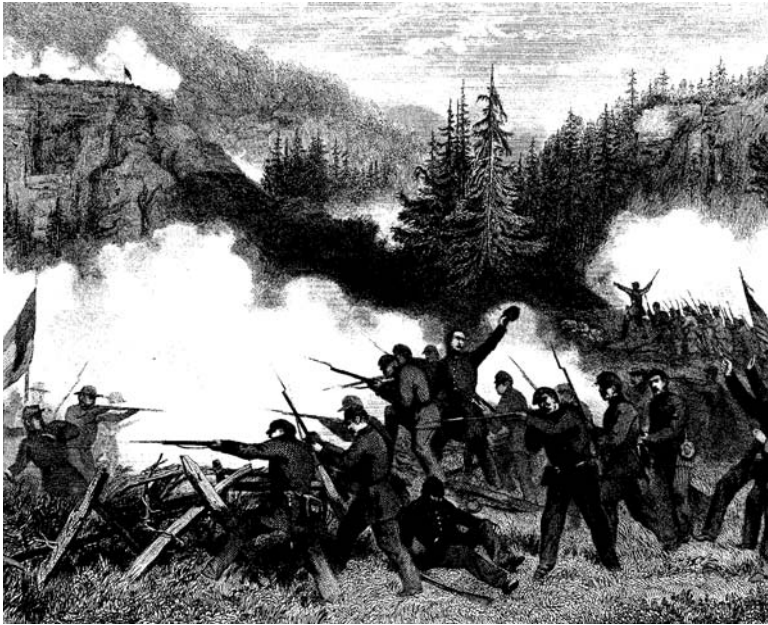
As federal officials prepared to try Brown's group for treason, they feared that a new abolitionist raid might attempt a rescue. Harpers Ferry was put under martial law. Security was augment-

ed by cadets from Virginia Military Institute -- led by two West Virginians who later became Confederate generals, Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and "Tiger John" McCausland.

Brown and a half-dozen followers were hanged in late 1859, and passed into legend. Brown became a heroic martyr to some Northerners, and a crazed devil to most Southerners. Northerners praised him in anthems, paintings, poems, books, plays and eventually movies. His eloquent final words against trafficking in humans were reprinted many times.

In reality, he was both hero and devil. Whatever your view, he was a fiery figure in West Virginia's history -- creator of a bloody episode that changed the course of America.

( published June 17, 2009 )



West Virginia State Archives image, a lithograph by Alonzo Chappel, 1863

**The 1861 Battle of Rich Mountain, near Elkins — one of several Yankee victories over Confederates in West Virginia — is called the first major land battle of the Civil War.**

# Civil War swept West Virginia

Did you know that Charleston (population then “over 1,000”) changed hands four times during the Civil War?

Or that Charleston lawyer George S. Patton became a Confederate colonel who was killed in the Battle of Winchester— and his grandson became America’s most colorful general in World War II?

Or that Isaac Noyes Smith, sire of a Charleston banking family, was a Southern sympathizer who reportedly plotted sabotage after a Union takeover?

Or that Confederate Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson of Clarksburg had a less-adept cousin whose troops called him “Mudwall” Jackson?

Or that a Union unit in West Virginia was commanded by Col. Lew Wallace, who later wrote the novel *Ben Hur*?

Such fascinating glimpses into West Virginia’s past abound in a new book by Charleston writer-historian Mike Pauley, *Unreconstructed Rebel*. His illustrated volume tells of a fiery Confederate from Mason County who led numerous battles in West Virginia, who burned the city of Chambersburg, Pa. — and who refused to be “reconstructed” after the war, fleeing to Europe and Mexico instead. Pauley spun this account:

John McCausland’s ancestors were Scottish Protestants who were given lands in Northern Ireland in the 1620s, crowding out Catholics and starting the Ulster hate that continues today. Some McCauslands



came to America in 1800 and made their way west. John was born in 1836 in St. Louis. A neighbor child was Julia Dent, who later married Ulysses S. Grant.

McCausland's parents died and the children were brought to live with an aunt at Henderson, Mason County, across the Kanawha River from Point Pleasant. Twenty miles south along the Ohio River was Greenbottom, the estate of Congressman Albert Jenkins, also destined to become a Confederate general.

McCausland attended Buffalo Academy in Putnam County. Another future Confederate general, Jubal Early, often visited the site because his father lived beside the academy. Then McCausland entered Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, where his engineering professor was Thomas J. Jackson, who became "Stonewall," a fourth Confederate general. McCausland graduated first in his class, earned a graduate degree at the University of Virginia, then joined the VMI faculty.

When John Brown's raid failed in 1859, McCausland and Jackson were among VMI corpsmen sent to Harpers Ferry to stand guard during Brown's trial.

After Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860, secession fever grew in the South and was red hot at VMI. Two weeks after the attack on Fort Sumter (April 14, 1861), Virginia commander Robert E. Lee wrote to "Lieut. Col. John McCausland," telling him to return to the Kanawha Valley and enlist Southern volunteers.

McCausland, 25, lean and hawk-faced, placed a recruiting ad in the *Kanawha Valley Star*. (The region was sundered. The *Star* soon vanished, and a subse-

quent Charleston newspaper, the *West Virginia Journal*, was an abolitionist sheet that called for hanging of “rebel conspirators.”) Other volunteer companies were organized by Charleston lawyer Patton and Rep. Jenkins of Greenbottom.

Former Virginia Gov. Henry Wise took command of Kanawha Valley Confederate forces. He occupied Charleston, built fortifications on Tyler Mountain and sent raiders against Union troops as far north as Ripley and Glenville. The first real Kanawha Valley battle occurred July 17, 1861, when Confederates routed a Union company at Scary Creek, near St. Albans. Despite this victory, Wise abandoned Charleston and withdrew eastward, burning bridges as he went.

It was the start of four years of seesaw combat, in which more than 300 battles and skirmishes were fought in what is now West Virginia. McCausland’s cavalry unit was in the midst of many clashes. Briefly, he and his men took a train to Bowling Green, Ky. They nearly were captured when Union troops under Gen. Grant took Fort Donelson. But McCausland commandeered two steamboats and escaped across the Cumberland River.

Returning to Southern West Virginia, his units — which bore names like the Logan Wildcats, the Roane Riflemen, the Boone Rangers — joined a Confederate drive that retook the Kanawha Valley. They drove Union troops downriver, through Charleston, all the way to Point Pleasant.

Author Pauley says that McCausland conspired with two leading Charlestonians, Isaac Smith and Christopher Tompkins, to wage “fifth column” activity

in the valley if Union forces recaptured it.

The Confederates abandoned Charleston again in the fall of 1862 as a Union army approached — but no further mention is made of the sabotage plan.

Northern sympathizers won West Virginia's statehood in 1863 and the Confederates lost hope of regaining it. McCausland's horse soldiers fought mostly in eastern counties and the Shenandoah Valley.

Outnumbered and ill-fed, they couldn't withstand ever-bigger Union armies — yet they waged deadly raids. In one strike, McCausland reached the Georgetown suburb of Washington and became the only Confederate commander to near the Union capital. "Tiger John" was promoted to general in 1864.

The rampaging blue army burned VMI and other citadels of the Confederacy. In retaliation, Gen. Jubal Early ordered McCausland to march north, seize Chambersburg, Pa., and demand \$100,000 in gold to rebuild the burned Southern centers. If the ransom wasn't paid, he was to burn Chambersburg. He obeyed. The Pennsylvanians wouldn't pay; he burned their city on July 30, 1864.

Returning southward, McCausland seized Romney (which changed hands an amazing 56 times during the war), attacked Keyser (which changed hands 14 times), then lost many of his soldiers and horses in a surprise nighttime Union attack at Moorefield.

Outnumbered, ill-clothed, outgunned and starving, McCausland's mounted troops struggled through the final eight months of the war.

They faced superior Union cavalry led by suc-

successful commanders such as George Armstrong Custer. They were joined by Confederate guerrillas under Col. John “the Gray Ghost” Mosby in a fierce but doomed last stand. As Richmond fell and the Confederate army disintegrated, McCausland kept on attacking.

Lee surrendered on Palm Sunday, 1865, in a private home at Appomattox, but McCausland and his last few men broke through Union lines and fled back to the Kanawha Valley. At Marmet, they contacted a federal garrison and said they would become guerrillas in the hills if not granted amnesty. A Union officer wrote them a memo of parole.

McCausland went to the Charleston home of his brother, a physician, where he learned that an indictment was pending against him for burning Chambersburg. He obtained his inheritance money from his brother and fled — down the river to Cincinnati, to Michigan by train, into Canada, and then to Europe. In Paris he learned that Jubal Early of Buffalo and other ex-Confederate generals were in Mexico serving the foreigner Emperor Maximilian.

He sailed to Mexico in late 1865, but never joined Maximilian’s army — which was good, because the European intruder was overthrown and executed by peasant reformers in 1867. McCausland returned to West Virginia in 1868, in time for President Andrew Johnson’s amnesty for all ex-Confederates.

McCausland bought cheap, marshy, Kanawha Valley land at Pliny, Mason County. He drained it with a tile system (that still works today) and became a prosperous farmer. In 1878, while at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs for a Confederate reunion,

he met Charlotte Hannah, daughter of the cashier of the Kanawha Valley Bank.

They married and had four children. He built his family a massive stone home, "Grape Hill" (now in the National Register of Historic Places).

His wife died of tuberculosis at age 40 in 1891. In 1919, when McCausland was 82, Congress restored his citizenship. He died in 1927 at Pliny.

Pauley's tale augments the record of America's worst tragedy, in which 620,000 young men died in a struggle rooted in slavery.

Ironically, Pauley says "Tiger John," one of the deadliest combatants, didn't believe in slavery.

*(Published March 5, 1993)*

**ADDENDA:** West Virginia has hundreds of historical tales from the War Between the States.

For example, green Union troops under Gen. George McClellan easily routed green Confederates at Philippi on June 3, 1861, in a skirmish often called the first land battle of the Civil War.

Next, a gory clash at Rich Mountain near Elkins on July 11 is labeled the first major land battle. With only slight losses, the Yankees killed hundreds of southerners and took 600 prisoners in this and follow-up West Virginia encounters. McClellan telegraphed the victory to Washington — causing him to be promoted to commander of the Army of the Potomac.

Shepherd University's Center for the Study of the Civil War collects West Virginia episodes such as these:

Belle Boyd was a pretty Eastern Panhandle teen-

ager who became a spy for the Confederacy. She plied information from Union officers, then rode through battlefield lines at night to inform fellow West Virginian Stonewall Jackson. She killed a Union officer, was jailed twice, but was released — and later was sent by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to London with diplomatic messages to the British.

Martin Delany was born a free black in Charles Town, but it was a crime for blacks to attend school or learn to read. His mother was arrested for teaching him. The family fled to Pennsylvania, where the son eventually started a black newspaper and recruited volunteers for a famed Massachusetts black regiment that fought Confederates.

Between 20,000 and 21,000 West Virginia men fought for the South in the Civil War, while Union volunteers are estimated between 20,000 and 30,000.

Much of Charleston burned in the fall of 1862 during a bloody battle in which Confederates forced Yankees to retreat down the Kanawha Valley. Eighteen Southern soldiers were killed, and 25 Northern ones, while nearly 200 were wounded.

During times of Union control, a camp at the mouth of Ferry Branch was commanded variously by Rutherford Hayes and William McKinley, both later U.S. presidents. Above that site, atop Fort Hill, a dozen cannons of Fort Scammon dominated Charleston and the valley below. Today, earthworks that once shielded the guns remain clearly visible. The ten-acre crest is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Machine guns were mounted behind earthworks on Blair Mountain, where “deputies” paid by coal mine owners fought off advancing strikers.

(Gazette-Mail file photo)

# The mine wars

West Virginia’s notorious mine wars of the early 1900s were America’s largest insurrection since the Civil War, and also the nation’s worst armed labor strife. Here’s a thumbnail record:

As coal mining blossomed in the late 1800s, thousands of immigrants and blacks poured into Southern West Virginia for dirty, dangerous coal jobs. The diggers mostly lived in company camps, were paid in “scrip” tokens spendable only at company stores, and were exploited somewhat like serfs in bondage. Explosions and cave-ins killed multitudes. In 1907, a mine blast at Monongah, Marion County, took nearly 400 worker lives. One historian said U.S. combat troops in World War I had better survival rates than West Virginia miners.

The new-formed United Mine Workers attempted to unionize the diggers. Mine owners hired armed Baldwin-Felts detectives as union-busting mine guards. Brutality abounded. Union organizers - including tough-talking Mary “Mother” Jones - were

jailed repeatedly.

In 1912, Paint Creek miners in eastern Kanawha County struck. Forced out of their company homes, they lived in tent clusters. To counter armed company guards, the UMW sent in guns and ammunition. Gov. William Glasscock declared martial law. Coal operator Quinn Morton put machine guns on a train dubbed "the Bull Moose Special," which rolled along Paint Creek in 1913 firing at tents. Only one striker was killed - reportedly because armored slits in the train cars prevented the machine guns from tilting downward toward crouching, hiding targets. In retaliation, armed miners attacked a guard camp at Gallagher in a battle that killed 16.

By 1919, Logan and Mingo counties were a major nonunion zone. Mine owners paid Logan Sheriff Don Chafin - a political dictator who controlled every public job in the county - to hire many "deputies" to beat and expel union agents and miners who attended organizing sessions. Chafin's sheriff salary was \$3,500 a year, but a later inquiry learned that mine owners paid him about \$33,000 more annually. He grew rich, and brutal. He was shot twice in clashes with miners.

In 1919, armed miners assembled at Marmet to march on Logan. They wore red bandannas and called themselves "red-necks." They made it as far as Danville, Boone County, before turning back.

In 1920, Mingo miners struck. Armed Baldwin-Felts agents evicted them from company houses. Matewan Police Chief Sid Hatfield backed the strikers. He led a squad of armed miners to face the union-busters at the town's railway platform. The shoot-out killed seven guards and four townspeople, including Mayor C.C. Testerman. Hatfield soon married Testerman's widow.

Near-warfare ensued in Mingo. In 1921, a three-day gunbattle raged at Merrimack, killing perhaps 20. President Warren Harding declared martial law in West Virginia. Gov. Ephriam Morgan proclaimed that the region was in "a state of war, insurrection and riot." West Virginia's State Police force was created chiefly to curb coalfield violence.

Police Chief Hatfield, ruled innocent in the "Matewan Massacre," was charged with a different shooting at Mohawk coal camp in McDowell County, along with a companion, Ed Cham-



bers. As the two walked up the steps of the McDowell courthouse at Welch for a hearing, Baldwin-Felts men in the crowd stepped out and shot them both to death.

The Hatfield-Chambers murder inflamed union miners. They rallied at the Capitol in Charleston and vowed to march southward like an army. UMW leaders Frank Keeney and Bill Blizzard roused workers to arm themselves. In Logan County, Sheriff Chafin had been preparing for such an invasion. He enlarged his deputy legion to around 700, brought in machine guns, and built war-style breastworks on Blair Mountain, a natural barrier shielding Logan. Chafin also engaged his own air force: three rented biplanes to scout for approaching mobs and drop home-made bombs on them.

About 5,000 bandanna-wearing “rednecks” gathered at Lens Creek in eastern Kanawha and headed south on Aug. 24, 1921. More joined them along the way, swelling the throng to an estimated 10,000 to 15,000. As the first groups approached Blair Mountain, some strikers hijacked a train and backed it 15 miles to Madison to transport more fighters.

Among the rebels was Baptist minister James Wilburn, who mobilized a squad of armed supporters. On Aug. 31, Wilburn’s men killed three of Chafin’s deputies, and one of the preacher’s fighters died.

Full-scale warfare between defenders on Blair and strikers below ensued for several days. Chafin’s forces included state troopers, militiamen, Baldwin-Felts guards and deputized Logan countians. Hundreds of thousands of bullets were fired in the woodland, but casualties were surprisingly light, perhaps under 20. Nobody knows an accurate body count.

President Harding sent federal troops from Kentucky, plus an air squadron under World War I hero Billy Mitchell from Langley Field near Washington. Mitchell’s biplanes landed in an open field in Kanawha City - but six got lost and crashed in Nicholas County, Raleigh County and Virginia.

Rather than fight the U.S. Army, the strikers withdrew. Many hid their guns in the woods, took off their red bandannas, and slipped away undetected.

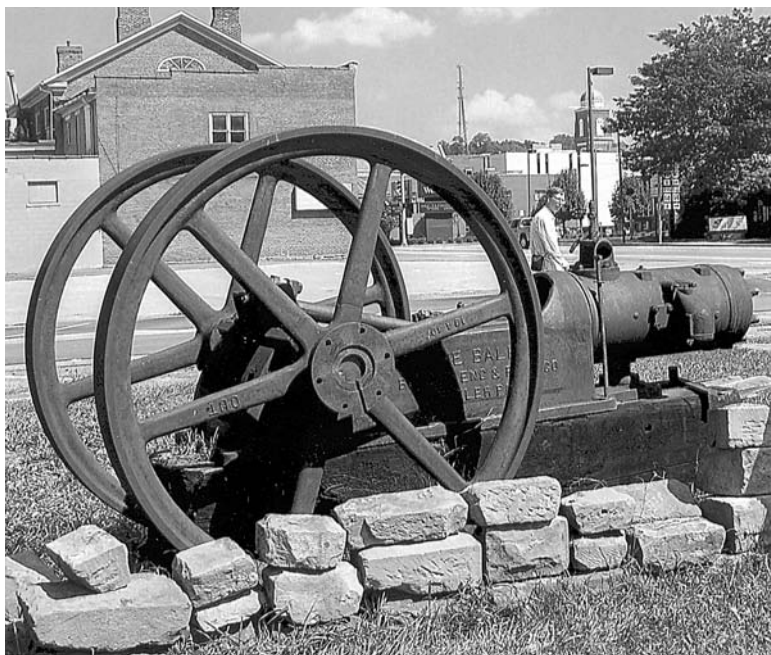
After the Battle of Blair Mountain, grand juries returned

1,217 indictments, including 325 for murder and 24 for treason (against West Virginia, not America). But the charges mostly evaporated. The only treason conviction was against a Walter Allen, who skipped bail and vanished, never to be found. Bill Blizzard, the “general” of the miner army, was tried in the same Jefferson County Courthouse where John Brown had been convicted of treason in 1859. Unlike Brown, Blizzard was cleared. Preacher Wilburn and his son were convicted of murder, but Gov. Howard Gore pardoned them after they served three years in prison.

The mine wars wiped out most of the UMW’s funds and left it weak. By 1924, it had lost about half of its West Virginia members. Unions remained under severe attack until 1933, when President Roosevelt’s New Deal legalized the right of workers to organize. March leader Blizzard, revered among miners, became UMW district president and led rapid unionization of the Mountain State.

In 2009, Blair Mountain was put on the National Register of Historic Places -- then it was removed, and months of controversy ensued. If this West Virginia saga isn’t significant enough for nationwide historic recognition, I don’t know what would be.

(published Feb. 7, 2010 )



Gazette photo by Helen Haught Fanick

**Long silent, this one-cylinder gas engine with a huge fly-wheel rests outside the state Oil & Gas Museum at Parkersburg.**

# Might pumpers of Tyler oil boom

Oil Ridge twists high behind Sistersville, Tyler County, overlooking the Ohio Valley. My grandfather was an oilfield pumper there in the 1930s, living in an oil company house and running monster engines that kept hilltop wells flowing.

When I was a tot, a visit to Oil Ridge was awesome. The wham-wham-wham of the great single-piston machines could be heard before we reached Grandfather's house. He took me on his rounds, locking vivid impressions forever into my memory.

In my child's eyes, the black pumper engines looked as big as railway locomotives. Flywheels taller than Grandfather whirled. Long steel rods rammed pistons into barrel-size cylinders. Spinning brass governors spread outward as speed increased, reducing gas flow and slowing the behemoths.

Power from the banging pumpers was conveyed by cables that ran like a network to several wells. The cables slid back and forth in ditches and wooden slots in the ground. Some rode on "walking beams" that swayed to and fro. It was fascinating.

Today, my sister and I sometimes visit the state Oil and Gas Museum in Parkersburg or the annual Oil and Gas Festival held at Sistersville each mid-September. Nostalgia floods us as we see the mighty pumpers running again, tended by hobbyists who preserved and reconditioned them.

At a recent festival, we found some books on Sistersville and West Virginia's oil-and-gas boom.

From them, here's a thumbnail history:

Back in the 1700s, this region had two "burning springs" where emissions from the ground often caught fire. One was on the Kanawha River near Charleston. After surveying the region, George Washington bought 250 acres there in 1771, "making the father of our country the first petroleum industry speculator," the Oil and Gas Museum says. The other was on the Little Kanawha River near Parkersburg. An amazed Thomas Jefferson wrote that a candle could ignite dazzling flame from the spring.

Salt-drillers upriver from Charleston often were disgusted when they hit oil instead, and diverted the greasy goo into the Kanawha River. But the value of oil and gas became apparent. "Natural gas was moved in wooden pipes from wells to be used as a manufacturing heat source by the Kanawha salt manufacturers as early as 1831," the museum says.

U.S. history books often say the world's first oil well was drilled in 1859 at Titusville, Pa. — but some West Virginia archivists say the Mountain State was well ahead of Pennsylvania.

By 1860, oil was worth \$30 a barrel, and various West Virginia families became millionaires by drilling shallow wells. Several of them used their wealth to fund the break from Virginia during the Civil War. Confederate troops raiding through West Virginia destroyed many oil rigs to keep fuel from the Yankees.

Sistersville was pioneered by Charles Wells, who previously founded Wellsburg and Wellsville in the Northern Panhandle. In 1802, he floated his family of 22 children down the Ohio on a flatboat and landed at fertile bottom territory. After trees were cleared, the

sector became thriving farms. Upon his death, he left two large tracts to two daughters, and these sisters started Sistersville in 1815.

A new pictorial history of Sistersville and Tyler County by Luke Peters says the sisters wanted their town to be the county seat, and laid out a place for “the courthouse, jail, whipping post, and offices of the lawyers.” But the Virginia legislature chose Middlebourne as county seat.

Sistersville remained small and agricultural until 1891, when a farmer on Pole Cat Run struck a gusher and started a black gold rush. Drilling flared everywhere. Wooden derricks rose amid homes on many Sistersville streets, along the riverbank, and at nearby farms. Hordes of money-seekers rushed to the river town, overwhelming the community.

Historian Peters says the swarming newcomers slept in tents, in crude wooden hotels and in “houseboats four and five deep” tied to the riverbank. Saloons, bordellos, a casino and a brewery sprang up to serve the workers. Muddy streets were paved with bricks provided by “the saloonkeepers and gambling house proprietors, since they were operating illegally without licenses.”

The oil upsurge spawned great wealth for owner families, who built Victorian mansions that still grace Sistersville as historic treasures.

Not long ago, my sister and I drove out Oil Ridge, retracing our roots, but we couldn’t find even the foundation of Grandfather’s company house. And the great pumper engines are long silent, except when hobbyists revive their wham-wham-wham at the Oil and Gas Festival.

*(Published Sept. 30, 2007)*





**Primitive working conditions at the mouth of the huge tunnel dug to divert New River downward to power turbines. (State Archives photo)**

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## **The Hawks Nest tragedy**

A terrible chapter of West Virginia history was partly hidden for many years, but finally emerged into stark daylight.

At the depth of the Great Depression, when millions of jobless men were desperate for work of any sort, a contractor paid a pittance to an army of diggers boring a tunnel at Hawks Nest, to divert the New River steeply downward to turbines to supply power for Union Carbide's smelting plant at Alloy.

Rock inside the mountain was loaded with silica. Tunnel crews - about two-thirds black, paid less than whites - weren't given facemasks or respirators. Those were reserved only for company executives and inspectors. The workers breathed a blinding cloud of white dust. Neither water sprays nor exhaust fans controlled the airborne grit, except when inspectors visited. The contractor saved money by avoiding these expenses.

Before long, diggers wheezed and sickened with silicosis. A

company doctor gave them little black pills and blamed excessive partying. Many laborers died in nearby shacks. Numerous black bodies were hauled by a Summersville undertaker, who buried them in unmarked graves in a cornfield. Other coughing men, unable to work, returned to out-of-state homes, where they died.

After the industrial tragedy became obvious, a congressional committee held a hearing in 1936, but corporation leaders and state officials minimized the ugliness. Carbide said only 109 workers died. Gov. Homer Holt angrily censored a WPA Writers Project account, calling it “propaganda from start to finish.” West Virginia history courses in schools didn’t mention the calamity.

In 1986, Yale University professor Martin Cherniak published “The Hawk’s Nest Incident: America’s Worst Industrial Disaster.” His research counted 764 tunnel workers who died. In 2008, Fayette County native Pat Spangler wrote “The Hawks Nest Tunnel,” including the congressional transcripts. In 2009, West Virginia University psychologist Dwight Harshbarger wrote a gripping novel titled “Witness at Hawks Nest.”

Volunteers sought to create a memorial to the long-forgotten victims. The Nicholas County Historical and Genealogical Society, plus a Beckley sorority chapter and New River Community and Technical College, obtained a grant for that purpose. Nicholas Chronicle publisher Charlotte Yeager Neilan wrote:

“Perhaps as many as 1,500 workers lost their lives in the Hawks Nest tunnel disaster. These workers died from acute silicosis in what is America’s worst industrial disaster. Many of these individuals now lie in unmarked graves. We have identified an unmarked and unkempt gravesite of at least 40 for these victims in our area. This is a wrong that must be corrected.”

Amen. West Virginia should have acknowledged the tragedy and honored its casualties long ago.

(published July 14, 2010)





West Virginia State Archives photo, Robert and Paul Eary plowing,  
Anne Eary collection

**Like medieval times, horse-powered farming prevailed in West Virginia before World War II.**

# Good grief, what is coming?

Look back over your life and count the amazing changes.

There was no electricity in Reader, the Wetzel County farm town where I was born. We had gaslights with fragile mantles that crumbled at a touch, and gas stoves hooked up with rubber hoses. Families outside of town, beyond the gas lines, lived with smelly kerosene lamps and wood stoves.

People used gasoline-powered Maytag washers that sounded like machine guns and had long exhaust hoses to carry off fumes. Some hilltop families had windmill chargers for their battery radios.

My family was the white-collar elite — father a postmaster, mother a schoolteacher — and we enjoyed the finer things: a Model-A coupe, an Oliver No. 9 typewriter that hammered like a gandy-dancer crew, a Ludwig upright piano that weighed a ton, running water from a gas-powered neighborhood pumping system.

Hollow folks had handle pumps, washbasins, thundermugs, outdoor privies. Horse-drawn wagons were their chief transport. State route 20 from New Martinsville to Clarksburg was gravel that clanked against fenders and running-boards. Some other roads were just mud. Horses were as common in the streets as cars. A passing airplane caused everyone to stop and stare.

When electricity came to Reader, wires were tacked across our ceilings. My father kept the

gaslights too, because he mistrusted novelties.

Plastic was unknown. A few things were made of “hard rubber” or Bakelite.

Streamlined cars finally appeared and my family got a racy 1937 Ford. The price was outrageous: \$800.

When World War II arrived, all the young men left and I, age 10, was the only farmhand available to the Haughts. My old uncle’s farm two miles up Big Fishing Creek was horse-operated, little changed from a century earlier. We plowed and mowed by team, milked and hoed by hand, killed copperheads in the hayfields, found Indian arrowheads in the corn furrows. Frugality was supreme; every bent nail was saved and carefully straightened.

After the war, change stirred. Jet planes and nuclear bombs were in the news. Dial telephones came to Reader — except for Furbee Ridge, which still had hand-crankers on the wall. A state prison camp moved to town and convicts built the first asphalt road.

I came to Charleston in 1949 to live with an aunt and uncle, and they had the new miracle: a massive wooden television set with a tiny black-and-white screen. We stared for hours at wrestling matches and the Kukla, Fran & Ollie puppet show. (Is today’s programming really any better?)

The pace quickened: Long-playing records replaced clunking stacks of 78-rpm disks. The first ballpoint pens skipped and scraped. Tubeless tires arrived. So did wire recorders and heavy tape recorders. Autogiros evolved into helicopters.

Short segments of four-lane roads were built. Trolley tracks were paved over. Along came drive-in

restaurants, drive-in movies, drive-in banks, Polaroid cameras, synthetic fabrics, permanent-press clothes, contact lenses, frozen foods, ski slopes.

Space conquest took off like a rocket: Sputnik in 1957, manned flights in 1961, fixed-orbit communications satellites in 1963, a man on the moon in 1969. The first lunar landing was astounding. The second was a bore. We tire quickly of miracles.

Giant dishes of the National Radio Astronomy Center in Pocahontas County began listening to pulsars and quasars invisible to Mount Palomar.

Soon there were photocopiers, Super-8 movies, jet-skis, pantyhose, home videotape, microwave ovens, computers, hang-gliders, pocket calculators, digital watches, video game arcades. Jet trips to the Caribbean became as easy as a drive to Wheeling. West Virginia's first video jukebox was installed at Spanky's on Kanawha Boulevard.

Life expectancy rose from 48 years at the start of the century to nearly 80 years today, thanks largely to the discovery of penicillin and other antibiotics. Organ transplants and sex-change surgery and CAT-scans are commonplace. Magnetic resonance imaging is next.

Newspaper work formerly was a world of molten lead pots, arm-swinging Linotypes and Speed Graphic cameras as big as hatboxes. Typed news stories were sent to the composing room in a basket on pulleys through the ceiling. Automation arrived, first via ticker tape, then electronics. Now typewriters are antiques. We work on video screens filled with news fed by a roof dish from a satellite 22,000 miles above the equator. Humming boxes disgorge perfect

print. Lasers separate colors for photos.

Change hasn't been just technical. Divorce was unknown in the 1930s in Reader; now couples switch like a square dance. *Playboy* magazine brought sex into the open and paved the way for R-rated movies. Blacks weren't allowed into Charleston's restaurants, theaters, hotels or suburbs until the civil rights movement defeated the Jim Crow system. Religion tried to become "relevant" in the 1960s, but that movement got trampled by fundamentalists, Moonies, Krishnas and Jonestown. Housewives went to jobs and fast-food chains filled the kitchen gap. Rock music coalesced the youth culture. Homosexuals came out of the closet.

Good grief! Where are we headed? Genetically engineered babies? Moon colonies? Non-families? Twenty-hour work weeks on home terminals? Cyborg bodies with replacement parts?

In our lifetimes, we've seen more change than happened in 10 centuries before the Industrial Revolution. Yet sometimes it seems that nothing's really different. Life's still a struggle of raising children, paying bills, fixing the roof, coping with the rat-race.

But consider this comparison: Nat Burgess, the *Gazette's* typography chief, grew up with gaslights and horse teams on Blue Creek just outside of Charleston. Now he has a rotating dish that focuses on 14 different space satellites and brings him 120 television channels.

(Published Oct. 3, 1984)

**ADDENDUM:** When this column appeared, the computer revolution and Internet were just beginning. Now they have soared astoundingly, seizing a central role in daily life and commerce — another leap in humanity's constant evolution.



Like many Kanawha Valley businesses in the 1950s, Rock Lake swimming pool in South Charleston wouldn't admit blacks. When pickets protested the segregation, Gazette photographer Lew Raines went to snap the scene -- and wound up in this brawl with the pool's burly weightlifter guard. (Gazette file photo)

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## When 'white only' ruled West Virginia

In today's hodgepodge culture, with all sorts of people sharing the spotlight randomly, it's hard to remember the "white only" era that dominated Charleston and West Virginia after World War II.

It was a time of Jim Crow segregation. Blacks weren't al-



lowed into Kanawha Valley schools, restaurants, movies, hotels, swimming pools or neighborhoods. Few jobs were open to them. They were confined to ghettos, hounded by police prowling for “vice.” In the eyes of white society, blacks ranked at the bottom.

Those bad old days came flooding back to me when I spoke at the funeral of Ed Peeks, age 90, who was a Charleston Gazette breakthrough reporter a half-century ago.

This newspaper had a long record of crusading for integration and equality. Publisher W.E. “Ned” Chilton III, backed by his wife Betty, hammered at white-only establishments and other racial barriers.

Chilton wanted to hire African American reporters. At first, he found only a wild Korean immigrant, K.W. Lee, who was assigned to the race beat. Lee says: “Ned, in his raspy voice, commanded me to ‘get the hell out of here and raise hell against Jim Crow places.’”

In 1963, Lee and former reporter Harry Ernst tracked down Peeks, who had been running black newspapers in Atlanta and Washington. They recruited him for the Gazette staff. Peeks was big, gruff, calm, steady, easygoing and unflappable. I took Peeks to the former Press Club, a fashionable bootleg joint on Kanawha Boulevard. I asked him: “Don’t you feel odd, being the only black face in this crowd?” He replied: “You think like a white guy. You’re accustomed to being in the majority -- but I’m always in the minority. I’m always outnumbered.”

Lee tells this vivid tale:

A Cedar Grove tavern had a “white only” sign in its front window. Lee confronted the owner, who pulled a pistol. Lee backed out the door. Later, he returned with Peeks, who spoke quietly and reasonably with the owner. The tavernkeeper pulled out a razor blade -- then walked to the window and scraped off the “white only” sign. Some Cedar Grove residents cheered him.

Those were stormy times. Schools were first to mix races, thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court. Kanawha Valley integration committees were formed. Equality marches were held. Pickets held “sit-ins” at lunch counters that wouldn’t serve blacks. Mixed-race groups were brutalized when they tried to enter

the former Rock Lake Pool. Marshall University students were beaten when they picketed a no-blacks Huntington restaurant. Huntington newspapers at that time wouldn't report their battle, so they came to the Gazette.

Then Congress passed human rights laws, forbidding racial barriers in housing, employment, public accommodations, etc. Year after year, segregation retreated. America kept moving toward equality.

During the historic civil rights struggle, many Deep South whites put up bitter resistance. Consider this contrast: In rural Arkansas, Gov. Orval Faubus pandered to racist whites, and his state became an ugly battleground over school integration. But in rural West Virginia, Gov. William Marland flatly said Mountain State schools would obey the Supreme Court. The transition mostly went smoothly here.

At the Peeks funeral, his casket was draped with an American flag, because he had fought in an all-black infantry unit in Italy during World War II. He might have been killed for his country -- but his country wouldn't allow him into the regular army, or into all the other venues open to whites in those days.

While Peeks risked death in Italy, Lee was on the opposite side of the war on the opposite side of the planet. He says he was "a teen-age air cadet trained to die like a cherry blossom for the emperor in Japan's last desperate hours." Yet both wound up as postwar partners at a West Virginia newspaper, battling racism.

During Peeks' long life, America slowly was transformed. Greater equality arrived. The nation is much more moral today.

( published Sept. 16, 2010 )



# Capers of a politician-crook

Near Huntington, the colorful mayor of Wayne — with the odd name of James Ramey Jr. III and the nickname “Little Junior” — is running for Wayne County sheriff, undeterred by his old prison record for tax evasion and a recent Ethics Commission fine for spending town funds on his private building.

This news rouses memories of Ramey’s flamboyant father, a legendary political scoundrel who was called “West Virginia’s greatest con artist.” I covered some of his escapades during the long period when I was the *Gazette’s* full-time investigator. Here’s the tale:

James Ramey Jr., commonly called Junior, was elected constable six times in Wayne County, and one of his many wives was a justice of the peace — back before West Virginia switched to the magistrate system. But Ramey was a bigger crook than any suspect he was supposed to catch. He pulled an amazing array of swindles and eventually went to prison four times.

First, during an election, a rival poll worker warned Ramey that he would block any vote-stealing by Ramey agents inside a Wayne precinct on Election Day. So, the night before the election, Junior had his magistrate wife issue a rape warrant against the poll worker. Junior hauled him to jail, where he languished through Election Day. The following day, Junior released him, saying the rape complainant had disappeared.

For that stunt, Ramey went to federal prison in 1964 for violating the rival’s political rights. One U.S. agent told me that Junior was the first American con-

victed under the nation's new civil rights laws, but I didn't make a nationwide inquiry to check it out.

After Ramey returned to Wayne County and resumed his constable role, amazing fraud complaints arose. Some victims said the constable sold them money-cranking machines that were supposed to turn dollar bills into ten-spots, but they didn't work. Another said he was sold chemicals to be used in a bathtub to turn blank paper into money, which likewise didn't work. An Arkansas fireworks firm said Ramey bilked it of \$10,000. Coin dealers from Alabama and Michigan said they gave the constable large sums for coin collections that didn't exist. Another victim paid for a wig business that couldn't be found. A Kentucky man paid for a truck-load of imaginary tires.

A Wayne County grand jury indicted the constable for swindling — but that case was delayed because he shot a young man three times with his police pistol. Three brothers quarreled with the Rameys at a Wayne drive-in restaurant owned by the constable's mother. He chased them in his Cadillac, shooting at them with his revolver. He shot out a tire, then shot one of the brothers thrice.

At his maiming trial, Ramey testified that he didn't file income tax returns for a dozen years because he had no earnings. He got 2 to 10 years in prison, but appealed to the state Supreme Court. On the day after the high court unanimously ruled against him, he vanished.

FBI agents caught him in Arizona after a high-speed chase involving a helicopter. He was charged with being a fugitive, carrying a pistol and assaulting a federal officer. He was returned to Huntington,

where former U.S. Judge Dennis Knapp gave him 10 years in prison.

Somehow, Ramey got a furlough from his federal lockup and returned to Wayne County — but state officers grabbed him and sent him to the Huttonsville state prison for his shooting conviction. He jumped out a prison hospital window and escaped.

Eventually he was paroled on condition that he never return to Wayne, Cabell or Logan counties. He moved to Mingo, ran for mayor of Delbarton, and claimed that he won a moral victory by getting 44 votes.

Finally, both he and his wife were convicted on federal charges for swindling the coin dealers. Ramey died in a U.S. prison in 1983.

Altogether, he had eight wives and 13 children. One son was named James Ramey Jr. II, or “Big Junior.” Another was James Ramey Jr. III, or “Little Junior.” The latter became mayor of Wayne at 22, the state’s youngest municipal chief. When Little Junior was sentenced to prison for tax evasion in 1987, more than 1,000 Wayne residents signed a petition begging for his release. He served two years, then returned as mayor.

Earlier this year, the state Ethics Commission fined Little Junior \$5,000 and ordered him to repay \$44,000 for city work on his private structure.

Another Ramey son, former Kermit Police Chief David Ramey, drew 15 years in federal prison for helping his wife and her parents run a huge Mingo County narcotics ring in the 1980s.

What an amazing West Virginia family.

*(Published Nov. 9, 2007)*

**ADDENDUM:** Little Junior lost his sheriff race.



Kennedy, state Sen. Ward Wiley and Franklin Roosevelt Jr. woo voters at Mullens, Wyoming County, from an open convertible in 1960. (Gazette-Mail file photo)

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## The landmark 1960 primary

A West Virginia event changed American history. The Mountain State's legendary 1960 primary election clinched the Democratic presidential nomination for John F. Kennedy and carried him into the White House.

Most historians assert that the famed West Virginia primary was a cultural landmark because it showed that mountain Protestants weren't too prejudiced to vote for a Roman Catholic, and thus America gained its first Catholic president. That's true, of course.

Actually, I don't remember much anti-Catholic hostility among Kanawha Valley folks during the historic campaign. The

worst prejudice came in vicious pamphlets sent into the state by national demagogues like evangelist Carl McIntire, a big Catholic-hater in those days.

Some observers think Kennedy deliberately spotlighted the religious issue, to nudge West Virginians to show they weren't prejudiced by supporting him. It conveyed an insidious message: Anyone backing his challenger, Hubert Humphrey, did so out of bigotry.

In the end, poor Humphrey was outclassed, outgunned, outspent, outmaneuvered - and lost the Mountain State so badly that he quit the presidential race. Kennedy seized the Democratic nomination and narrowly defeated Republican Richard Nixon for the presidency.

Personally, my foremost memory of those times involves disgusting corruption that tainted West Virginia politics back then, chiefly in southern coal counties.

Jack Kennedy hardly needed help from political crooks. He was an ideal candidate: handsome, youthful, witty, popular, a war hero with a gorgeous wife and a rich father who bankrolled him lavishly. His wealthy and glamorous relatives campaigned with him, covering West Virginia like an exuberant team. Kennedy's sparkling charisma made Democratic rival Humphrey seem drab. Humphrey was mostly alone, except for his wife.

JFK probably could have won the West Virginia showdown, purely on his personal appeal. But plenty of sleaze was committed on his behalf. Large bags of Kennedy cash were funneled to scummy courthouse kingpins in the coalfields, who listed Kennedy atop their "slates" of chosen candidates and used his father's money to buy votes. Here's the record:

On the day after the 1960 primary, the Logan Banner said the election was a spree of "flagrant vote-buying, whiskey flowing like water, and coercion of voters. ... You name it and we just about had it."

Logan political boss Raymond Chafin wrote in his autobiography, "Just Good Politics," that Humphrey agents first gave him \$2,500 for slate access - but Kennedy agents offered more. When they asked how much money would be required, Chafin told them "about 35," meaning \$3,500. But the JFK agents

misunderstood and sent him two suitcases containing \$35,000. Chafin was flabbergasted. His sidekick, Bus Perry, panicked and blurted: "I've already been in the penitentiary once. I'm not going back."

Chafin said he calmed Perry and phoned Kennedy headquarters to report the error, but was told to put the cash to good use. He put it to bad use.

Another Logan boss, Claude "Big Daddy" Ellis, claimed that the Kennedy camp sent him more than \$50,000, which went for "sawbucks and half-pints," the standard payoff to voters who let precinct workers "assist" them in choosing the designated slate. Ellis quipped that JFK didn't "buy West Virginia; he just rented it for a day."

Various national newspapers and magazines wrote about West Virginia's corruption in 1960. Life described coal-county "lever brothers" (a takeoff on Lever Brothers soap products), dishonest precinct workers who flipped levers of old-style voting machines for bribed voters.

"Votes are bought in every West Virginia election," former legislator Charlie Peters told USA Today. As Kennedy's Kanawha County chairman in 1960, he said Election Day payola was "like the old moonshining tradition." After Kennedy won, Peters went to Washington as a chief of Kennedy's new Peace Corps, and later founded Washington Monthly magazine. Years later, Peters wrote that corruption reports about that era had been overblown.

In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Making of the President, 1960*, Theodore White called Mountain State politics "the most squalid, corrupt and despicable" in America. "Politics in West Virginia involves money - hot money, under-the-table money, open money."

Kennedy's brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, later head of the Peace Corps, recalled sarcastically: "We played the West Virginia game by the West Virginia rules." All these allegations were compiled by state Supreme Court law clerk Allen Loughry in his 2006 book, *Don't Buy Another Vote. I Won't Pay for a Landslide*. The title refers to a joke by JFK, supposedly quoting a note from his father during the Mountain State primary.

Even worse, the Mafia reportedly joined the campaign. Pulitzer Prize-winner Seymour Hersh wrote a book titled *The Dark Side of Camelot*, contending that JFK's father got rich from bootlegging in the Depression, which gave him mob connections. Hersh said the father paid mob leaders to help his son in West Virginia, mostly in the Northern Panhandle and with unions like the Teamsters, then Mafia-dominated.

Hersh alleged that Judith Exner, one of JFK's many lovers, also was a girlfriend of Chicago crime boss Sam Giancana. The woman claimed that Kennedy gave her bags of money to carry to Giancana during the West Virginia struggle. Former *Gazette* Editor Don Marsh scoffed at the Hersh allegation.

In his book about West Virginia politics, *Afflict the Comfortable*, former *Gazette* writer Thomas Stafford said ex-editor Harry Hoffmann, a fellow Catholic, refused to believe that Kennedy's forces bought the 1960 primary. However, Stafford wrote that the newspaper's late publisher, W.E. "Ned" Chilton III, "settled the issue in his own blunt fashion" by declaring that Kennedy "bought a landslide, not an election."

At the peak of the campaign, Chilton helped lead a televised Kennedy-Humphrey debate, a forerunner of such face-offs that later become standard in elections.

I wasn't a political writer in 1960, so I covered fringe events - such as TV newsman David Brinkley visiting a dilapidated Lincoln County bridge to spotlight poverty and decrepitude in the hills. I attended a Lincoln stop in which gubernatorial candidate Wally Barron delivered a rouser speech about flag-saluting. He spoke from the back of a flatbed truck whose mudflaps said "Jesus Saves." Barron was strong for patriotism and religion, until he and most of his Statehouse chiefs went to prison.

One news photo from the campaign featured JFK petting my bandaged dog. My late wife had taken the injured pooch to a roadside campaign stop, and Kennedy paused to comfort the mutt, while cameramen snapped.

Poverty was horrendous in West Virginia in 1960, because coal mechanization in the 1950s had wiped out tens of thousands of miner jobs. The hardship made a gripping impression on JFK. After entering the White House, he showered help on the region through public works projects, food stamps, job train-



ing, Appalachian Corridor construction - and even providing electricity to remote sectors.

The world of 1960 no longer exists. Blatant vote-buying in southern coal counties is diminished today, thanks to many federal busts and passage of election cleanup laws. Political kingpins of the bad old days have faded and died.

But history is eternally fascinating. It's intriguing to recall the day when West Virginia changed America's destiny.

(published May 2, 2010)





*Gazette-Mail file photo*

**Gov. Barron crowned the state's Centennial Queen at the Capitol as West Virginia marked its 100th anniversary in 1963.**

# Barron era brought chaos

More dishonor came to West Virginia through the Barron administration than from all previous state governments.

The road commissioner and his deputy commissioner were sentenced to two years in federal prison after being convicted of an interstate bribery plot.

The motor vehicles commissioner was sentenced to 1-10 years in the state penitentiary for falsifying records to hide a multitude of things, including Florida weekends at public expense with his pretty blonde secretary.

The liquor commissioner was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison after being convicted of income tax cheating. Witnesses said he took bribes in return for placing new brands in state stores, and the prosecution said he forced liquor companies to pay unearned salaries to certain friends, including one “very close female acquaintance.”

The governor himself was indicted, a “first” for West Virginia.

His lifelong best friend and law partner was sentenced to four years in federal prison after conviction in the bribery conspiracy.

A self-appointed chum of the governor was sentenced to 1-10 years in the state penitentiary for a dummy corporation deal — but the conviction was reversed on grounds that he was so unanimously believed to be an influence-peddler he couldn’t possibly have received a fair trial.

A Road Commission official was sentenced to four years in federal prison for making off with an estimated \$300,000 worth of government property, including a five-ton truck, two Navy assault boats, a fire truck, three automobiles, 1,000 pairs of binoculars, 150 typewriters, a bulldozer, two miles of copper tubing, electronics equipment and a vast array of other items.

Altogether, 21 state officials and political insiders from the Barron administration were indicted on felony charges. Such a record towers above all past scandals in West Virginia. The only previous noteworthy cases — and they seem paltry by comparison — were in 1941, when House Speaker Malcolm Arnold, D-Boone, and Del. Lester Perry, D-Logan, were convicted of embezzling state funds; in 1876, when State Treasurer John S. Burdett was convicted of misusing state money and impeached by the state Senate; and in the early 1930s when the Irreducible School Fund was substantially reduced by irregular loans to regular politicians.

(The man in the middle of the latter scandal was Republican State Auditor Edgar C. Lawson. After being turned out of office, he was indicted for fraudulent sale of securities, but his trial at Beckley resulted in a hung jury. Later he ran as a GOP candidate for governor. Eventually, he showed up in the historic Barron administration bribery conspiracy case, as a partner in a Florida corporation along with six accused conspirators. He is a brother-in-law of Alfred W. Schroath, one of those convicted in the conspiracy case.)

### **The beginning**

The Barron administration was a hot potato even

before it took office.

William Wallace Barron, handsome Elkins lawyer, son of a Presbyterian minister, had galloped along the success trail in Democratic politics. He was mayor of Elkins, then a member of the Legislature, then state liquor chairman under Gov. William Marland, then attorney general during the term of Gov. Cecil Underwood. Finally, in 1960, with the backing of the old Democratic "Statehouse machine," he ran for governor.

During the primary campaign, State Treasurer Orel Skeen, also seeking the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, released a tape recording which he said contained Barron's voice offering him \$65,000 to stay out of the primary race. The conversation had been recorded six months previously at Skeen's home at Ripley. A former FBI man had hidden upstairs and operated a recorder, Skeen said, while he lured Barron into conversation in a "bugged" room downstairs.

The voice on the tape said:

"...Well, I told you what I've got to offer. If we pitch in together, and if we make the grade, we go back to our original understanding. It still stands. And that was about \$65,000. ... I'm willing just to talk cold turkey along this line, if we can get this governorship in a mutual endeavor. Now we agreed we couldn't extend it beyond the two of us. This is a matter strictly between us. Now, whatever we want to do with our buddies, why we'll do. ... If we make it together, we share and share alike. ... We'll spend the four years together."

Upon this disclosure, candidate Barron exploded, called the tape a "rigged record," and sued Skeen

for \$300,000 for slander. Skeen challenged Barron to mutual lie-detector tests to show who was telling the truth. Barron declined.

Despite the tape affair, and various other accusations, Barron won the nomination. Then he dropped his suit against Skeen, saying the matter had been settled out of court.

But the GOP nominee for governor, Harold Neely of Hinton, revived the issue in the general election campaign. He played the tape in public and issued printed transcripts of it. Barron sued him for \$400,000. In preliminary wrangling in Kanawha Circuit Court, Barron admitted he had participated in the conversation at Skeen's home, but said the \$65,000 referred only to a proposed sharing of campaign expenses.

Again, Barron won the election, and became the 26th governor of West Virginia. Neely attended his foe's inauguration Jan. 16, 1961, and suffered a heart attack the same day. Barron eventually dropped his suit against the GOP nominee in deference, he said, to Neely's health.

### **The Term**

At first, Gov. "Wally" Barron's tenure seemed like most others. State government proceeded as usual. The only different features were Barron's statewide cleanup campaign, his frequent lectures to audiences on the proper way to salute the flag, his vast preparations for the 1963 state centennial, and his invitations to audiences to "come up to the mansion and visit Opal" (his delightful wife, one of the most charming first ladies the state ever had.)

But, slowly, a miasma of rumor and suspicion began to rise.

In the fall of 1961, the *Charleston Daily Mail* published a series of articles saying Barron had spent several vacations at the lakeside mansion of a Maine liquor agent who had been the central figure in a Maine bribery scandal — and that, after Barron's last vacation, sales of a liquor brand represented by the Maine agent doubled in West Virginia. The governor denied any wrongdoing, and said liquor sales in state stores naturally rise and fall.

In 1961 and 1962, several of Gov. Barron's aides and friends became partners in an insurance firm started by Hugh N. Mills, business manager of the State Road Commission. Other officers or investors included Curtis B. Trent Jr., the governor's chief assistant and long-time friend; Charleston lawyer James V. Brown, whose wife Virginia Mae was a veteran Barron aide whom he appointed as his new state insurance commissioner; Dale Keith Cooke, finance director of the SRC and an ally of Trent; Charleston appliance dealer Alex Dandy, a little-known figure often seen in the company of Barron or his aides.

The firm, Mountaineer Fire and Casualty Co., became the object of several accusations. Three persons charged that MF&C was using SRC processing machines to handle monthly bookkeeping. They said Cooke regularly took the firm's data cards to the state offices where he and Mills were in charge of such work.

The atmosphere of suspicion grew. Much of it centered around Alex Dandy, who had dropped his appliance store and had become a "business consultant" whose clients included firms doing business

with the state. He constantly described himself as “a good friend of Wally,” and also talked of his comradeship with Barron’s aide Trent and others close to the governor.

Dandy’s claims to influence became comical. In April, 1963, he had an intense political strategy talk with Charleston police Capt. Van Brown in the captain’s squad car — and the shortwave radio switch happened to be open, so the talk was broadcast all over town. In 1963, a fired Charleston policeman testified in a Civil Service hearing that Dandy had promised to protect him through “his power in this state.”

A rumor spread that Dandy was going to meet Gov. Barron in Paris while the governor was leading a trade mission to Europe. Sure enough, they both wound up registered at the same hotel in Paris. When called by the Associated Press bureau in Paris, Gov. Barron first denied even knowing Dandy, then said it was only coincidence that they happened to be in the same hotel. After returning to Charleston, the governor angrily proclaimed that Dandy “has no more power in my administration than my dog, Bozo.”

By 1964, the final year of Barron’s term, whispers about corruption in government had become ceaseless. Republican ex-Gov. Cecil Underwood, running again for his old office, drew the rumors into the campaign. Gov. Barron made terse denials.

During the primary race, one of the contenders for the Democratic nomination was Bonn Brown of Elkins, former state American Legion commander and Barron’s old law partner and best friend. (He had been a constant visitor at the Capitol during the Barron term — and it was discovered in 1963 that he



had his own private office, complete with secretary, set up in a spare room at the Capitol.)

He campaigned with the slogan “Brown Means Business.” Borrowing the phrase, *The Charleston Gazette* published a series of articles titled “Brown Means Business” by Thomas Stafford outlining a strange network of business firms — some of them only “dummy corporations” — which Brown helped operate in West Virginia, Ohio and Florida. (Four years later, the same firms were the crux of the historic bribery conspiracy trial.)

Brown lost the primary race to State Commerce Commissioner Hulett C. Smith, who had run on a pledge to establish an “administration of excellence.” Election years usually are brutal in West Virginia, but events were brewing to make 1964 a classic.

### **The Flood Case**

In June, a Kanawha County grand jury began an investigation of dummy corporations involved in stream repair work after a tragic 1961 flash flood in Charleston.

When the grand jury report came out, it criticized the state Commerce Department for slipshod handling of federal funds provided for the emergency work. The report spoke of “hastily formed corporations obviously organized for the express purpose of doing business with the state... often organized by people with extreme influence.”

The grand jury made no indictments, but urged a September grand jury to continue the probe.

In August, Alex Dandy moved to Bethesda, Md., claiming he had been ruined in Charleston by unflat-

tering newspaper reports.

The September grand jury continued the flood investigation — then jarred West Virginia with the first big indictment of political insiders. Dandy and five others were charged with falsifying state records. The indictment said Dandy and associates had formed Pioneer Construction Co. to perform flood repair work — but to conceal the fact that friends of the state administration were getting a large share of the federal money, some of the invoices were submitted through dummy firms.

Ruth Maley, a Commerce Department coordinator in charge of paying for flood work, was accused of “requiring that Pioneer Construction Co. submit unto the Disaster Recovery Agency false statements and invoices in the name of and on behalf of the Belich Construction Co., H. Lacey Co. and Stanton Construction Co.”

Dandy was charged with abetting Mrs. Maley. So was James V. Brown, husband of Virginia Mae Brown, who had become a Public Service Commission member. Brown was Dandy’s partner in Pioneer Construction Co.

Others indicted were Rand contractor Emil Belich, Charleston accountant Harry Lacey, and an unknown man named John Stanton, all accused of allowing Dandy to use them as imaginary contractors for the purpose of submitting bills to the state.

The indictments hit less than a month before the general election, with noisy impact on the race between Republican Underwood and Democrat Smith. Underwood made a flood repair splash of his own. He released an affidavit from a Huntington

woman who claimed her former husband, a contractor, paid \$3,285 to a top Barron aide in return for his influence in obtaining flood repair work and “as pay-off for stone sold to the state.”

The accused state official, Fire Marshal Richard Kyle, a former Huntington minister, denied the charge. So did the contractor, J.E. Greene, who said his ex-wife was only trying to get revenge upon him. Kyle resigned as fire marshal, but maintained he was innocent. He filed a \$1 million libel suit against Underwood. (The suit never was tried. Kyle became an aide to Virginia Mae Brown in Washington, where she had become a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission.)

Despite the scandal, Democrat Smith won the election and became Barron’s successor as governor. It had been assumed that Smith would remove many old Barron appointees in his “administration of excellence.” But he retained most of them — including four later convicted of federal crimes.

As for Barron, he opened a law office in Charleston and announced plans to help establish a bank in South Charleston in partnership with Secretary of State Joe F. Burdett and others. But the bank plan was rejected by federal agencies.

The flood relief trials began March 8, 1965, in Kanawha County Intermediate Court. Mrs. Maley’s case was heard first. Two days later, the jury found her guilty.

Dandy was next to be tried. His lawyers sought to have the trial moved to another city on grounds that Dandy was widely mistrusted in Charleston and suspected of being a political influence-peddler. Ex-Gov.

Barron, Curt Trent, former Secretary of State Joe F. Burdett and others testified they thought public suspicion was so strong a fair trial wasn't possible.

Judge William Thompson rejected the request for a change of venue. Dandy's trial began March 16. Judge Thompson ordered the jury locked up each night — a rare precaution in a non-capital case.

A printing firm employee testified that invoices for the nonexistent "Stanton Construction Co." and "H. Lacey Co." were prepared and delivered to Dandy at Pioneer's office.

In his own defense, Dandy testified that he submitted bills to the state under fake names only after two lawyers, James V. Brown and former State Tax Commissioner Don Carman, had advised him to. After ex-tax commissioner Carman's name was brought into the case, he was called as a witness. He couldn't be found, and a statewide police search was made for him. He finally was located, and appeared in court. He testified that he never attended any such meeting as Dandy described, and never advised Dandy to submit bills through nonexistent firms.

On March 20, the jury found Dandy guilty.

Three weeks later, Mrs. Maley asked for a new trial on grounds that new evidence had been found. A 66-year-old carpenter who worked for home-builder Belich signed an affidavit saying Dandy tried to get him to sign a \$1,200 invoice to the state claiming payment for flood work he never performed. The carpenter also said in his affidavit that he heard Dandy say "The Lord had sent the flood so he could get his money back, because he had put \$70,000 in to help elect Gov. Barron."

The 1961 flash flood killed 22 persons in Charleston.

Judge Thompson sentenced Mrs. Marley to 1-10 years in the state women's prison at Pence Springs, and he sentenced Dandy to 1-10 years in the state men's prison at Moundsville. Both began a series of appeals.

Meanwhile, James V. Brown had made two fruitless appeals to the State Supreme Court to have his indictment thrown out. But a third attempt, in Intermediate Court, succeeded.

For two years, Dandy and Mrs. Maley pressed their appeals. Finally in 1967, the State Supreme Court ruled that Dandy was entitled to a new trial because he should have been given a change of venue away from suspicion-ridden Kanawha County. Then the state Supreme Court voted 3-2 to give Mrs. Maley a new trial. Eventually, the Kanawha prosecutor's office dropped charges against both.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service made a civil tax assessment against Dandy, saying he concealed a quarter-million dollars of income during four years of his association with Barron.

### **Jack Nuckols**

The second jolt to confidence in government occurred in 1965. Gov. Barron's motor vehicles commissioner, suave, flamboyant Jack Nuckols, was indicted by a Kanawha grand jury on a charge of falsifying state records to swindle taxpayer money.

Indicted with him were Fred Vines, 60, of Flat Top, Raleigh County, caretaker of a private Flat Top, Raleigh County, lake where Nuckols had a summer

home.

Nuckols was accused of fraudulently putting Vines and four other persons on the state payroll when they did no state work, and of numerous swindles to benefit himself at state expense. Vines was accused of presenting false expense accounts to the state

Nuckols, from Beckley, a former Raleigh County commissioner and three-time member of the state Senate, had been appointed twice as motor vehicles commissioner by Barron.

The Nuckols trial began in 1966. The prosecution produced 56 state checks it said had been fraudulently paid to persons who did no state work. The checks included \$2,539 to Jay Rowe of Logan, father of Mrs. Jackie Dillow, Nuckols' fetching blonde secretary. They also included \$3,500 to two Charleston pilots whom the prosecution said Nuckols put on the state payroll as "clerk" and "examiner," but who did no other work than fly Nuckols on personal trips. They also included state payments to two secretaries working in a private insurance and hearing aid office which Nuckols operated in Charleston.

One of the pilots testified that he flew Nuckols and his wife to Nassau in the Bahamas. Then on the way back, he said, he left to the commissioner in Florida and returned Mrs. Nuckols to Charleston. The next day, he flew Mrs. Dillow to Florida, the pilot said, then returned a week later to pick up Nuckols and the secretary.

He also testified he flew Nuckols and Mrs. Dillow to Daytona Beach for Easter weekend, 1965. And he testified he flew Nuckols to Connecticut, where the motor vehicles commissioner had a daughter in school.

The other pilot testified he flew Nuckols, Vines and Vines' son to Kansas City, where they visited another Nuckols daughter, then on to Colorado Springs, where they picked up a Jeep for the commissioner. Vines drove the Jeep back to West Virginia, he said.

A Department of Motor Vehicles janitor testified that Nuckols twice sent him in a state car to Lewisburg to pick up Mrs. Dillow's son.

The prosecutor charged that Nuckols put his pretty secretary's father on the state payroll when he did no state work. Evidence also showed that Nuckols sometimes turned in automobile mileage expense bills for trips he actually had taken by airplane, and that he turned in gasoline expenses for his car when he actually was using a state gasoline credit card. The jury found him guilty Feb. 17, 1966. Five days later, Vines also was convicted.

Judge Thompson sentenced both Nuckols and Vines to 1-10 years in the state penitentiary at Moundsville.

### **Woodrow Yokum**

The third public jolt came when the equipment supervisor for the SRC Buckhannon District was charged with an incredible government property swindle.

Federal agents had discovered more than \$300,000 worth of surplus military equipment hidden on three Randolph County farms and in two storage rooms at Beverly. A federal grand jury indicted Woodrow Yokum, 45.

Among items Yokum was accused of obtaining fraudulently for his own use were a five-ton wrecker



truck, three automobiles, 1,000 pairs of binoculars, 150 typewriters, a bulldozer, two miles of copper tubing, electronic office equipment and hundreds of other things. He was charged with obtaining the property from Navy supply depots at Norfolk, Va., and Mechanicsburg, Pa., and an Army ammunition plant at Radford, Va.

The Yokum case also touched Chauncey Browning Jr., former state public institutions commissioner who had resigned to run for attorney general. It was learned that an aide had given his boss a Chrysler. The car turned out to be one of the stolen government vehicles.

The Yokum trial began May 20, 1968, in U.S. District Court at Elkins. Yokum's lawyer was Bonn Brown — which was embarrassing because, by that time, Brown had been indicted in Barron's giant bribery conspiracy.

The prosecution said Yokum made more than \$10,000 profit by reselling U.S. property. Attorney General Browning testified that when he got the car from his aide, he had no idea it was government property. Others testified that "Yokum drivers" brought U.S. property from Washington to West Virginia.

A former supervisor in the SRC district office at Buckhannon denied that Yokum made him a present of an ambulance — but admitted under questioning that he had the ambulance and hadn't paid for it.

After 10 days of trial, the jury found Yokum guilty on all counts of the indictment. He was sentenced to four years in federal prison.

In addition to his West Virginia troubles, Yokum was indicted at Alexandria, Va., on 35 counts of steal-

ing U.S. property. He was accused of taking typewriters, cameras, office equipment and numerous other items from a Quartermaster Corps station. After his West Virginia conviction, the Virginia indictment was dropped.

### **Curtis Trent**

Next in the parade of indictments came Curtis B. Trent Jr., Gov. Barron's chief administrative assistant.

A U.S. grand jury at Bluefield charged him with evading income taxes in 1960, 1961 and 1962. In one pretrial hearing, a U.S. attorney hinted that some witnesses in the case had been threatened. He also said the government was building its evidence around the widespread selling of cars and boats which Trent did while administrative aide to Barron.

Boats caused a problem for Trent once before. In October, 1961, Charleston Marine Repair inc. sued him for \$20,674 which the firm claimed it was owed for a houseboat and boating supplies and services. The claim included gasoline slips which had been signed by Carol Casdorff, a Capitol secretary.

Trent, a former Logan County school principal and member of the House of Delegates, was appointed state workmen's compensation commissioner by Gov. Patteson in 1949. Barron chose him for his top assistant both in the attorney general's office and later in the governor's office.

### **Clarence Elmore**

The fifth scandal was the first to involve a top-level department chief of the Smith administration.

Although he had been first appointed by Barron, state Alcohol Beverage Control Commissioner

Clarence C. Elmore Sr. remained a key figure in Smith's government.

He was retained in spite of an uproar in June, 1965. Charleston industrialist Bernard Jacobson testified before a legislative subcommittee that a liquor salesman he knew told him he had been asked to pay a bribe of \$10,000 to get his brands listed in West Virginia state stores. Elmore denied any knowledge of it.

A national campaign organizer named Jim Ward once told me: "I had the darnedest experience in West Virginia. I was hired to run the Hulett Smith campaign for governor, and they told me to get the campaign money from the liquor commissioner, Clarence Elmore. I went to Elmore's office, expecting him to bring out donor records and write checks for campaign expenses. Instead, he started poking around. He pulled a paper bag full of money off a shelf, and a satchel full of bills out of a drawer, and big envelopes of money from behind stuff on a table. He had cash hidden all over his office."

Elmore was still ABC commissioner in 1967 when a federal grand jury in Charleston indicted him on tax-evasion charges. His trial was held at Bluefield, in Elmore's home county. (A native of Princeton, he had been sheriff of Mercer County and a county commissioner.)

U.S. prosecutors declared that Elmore had demanded cash payoffs from liquor companies in return for listing their brands in state stores. Further, Elmore required them to employ certain of his friends as their "representatives" in West Virginia, even though they did no work. One of those hired, a prosecutor said, was a "very close female acquaintance"

of Elmore. She did no work for her salary, he said — it was just “one more price” the liquor firm had to pay for the right to do business in West Virginia.

Also, the prosecutor added, Elmore collected a “very substantial amount of over-reimbursement” in travel expenses.

An insurance agent from a Princeton agency once operated by Elmore testified that Elmore was kept on the books as an agent after he became ABC commissioner, and he received 50 percent of all commissions on the firm’s business with the state.

The prosecution introduced 42 travel expense vouchers indicating that Elmore charged the state mileage for his personal car when he also used a gasoline credit card intended for his state car.

D. Earl Brawley, former Kanawha County sheriff, doorkeeper of the House of Delegates and salesman for two liquor firms, testified that his companies paid \$2,000 in bribes to Elmore in 1963 and 1964.

Elmore himself took the stand and denied everything. He said part of the unexplained money he had been spending was a \$10,000 loan his father-in-law made to him. The father-in-law died, he said, so he never repaid the money.

Elmore was asked by the prosecution if he had paid insurance premiums for a Mrs. Nora Dodd, apparently the “very close female acquaintance” mentioned at the opening of the trial. He said he had.

In summation, a U.S. attorney blasted Elmore for payoffs, kickbacks, graft, theft and embezzlement. He said it was clear Elmore had “dipped into the till” and stolen Democratic party money collected through the “flower fund” contributions in his department.

Another prosecutor said Elmore's personal financial holdings were less than \$1,000 when he took office, but had risen to more than \$30,000 by 1963. The prosecutor also asked: "Why would Clarence Elmore deal in cash in excess of \$20,000 in 1962 and 1963 when he had three checking accounts?"

On Sept. 25, 1968, after 13 days of trial, the jury found Elmore guilty. U.S. Judge John Field sentenced the commissioner to 18 months in federal prison and fined him \$5,000.

### **The Big One**

In the long series of bombshells, the sixth was thermonuclear. On Feb. 13, 1968, a U.S. grand jury in Charleston indicted ex-Gov. Barron, State Road Commissioner Burl A. Sawyers, Deputy Road Commissioner Vincent Johnkoski, Finance and Administration Commissioner Truman E. Gore, Elkins lawyer Bonn Brown and Clarksburg automobile dealer Alfred W. Schroath for "conspiring to carry out bribery activities involving state government."

U.S. Attorney Milton Ferguson issued a statement saying the mammoth indictment charged that Brown and Schroath set up dummy corporations in Ohio and Florida, then told prospective sellers they could get state contracts if they paid money to the dummy corporations.

After the payoffs had been made, it said, Barron, Sawyers, Johnkoski and Gore rigged state bidding to insure that the bribers won contracts. The rigging was done, the indictment said, by arranging for required competing bids to come from nonexistent firms or from firms owned by the same bidder, and also by drafting specifications in such a way that only

one firm could bid.

The indictment charged that all the payoff money eventually was to be transferred to one of the Florida corporations and then, at a safe future date, be divided equally among the six defendants. The six had pledged themselves to keep their identities secret, the accusation declared.

Sawyers, Johnkoski and Gore, all of whom had been retained from Barron days by Gov. Smith, were still in their state posts when the indictment came.

Sawyers and Johnkoski, as top powers of the SRC, had been involved in a cinder scandal early in the Smith administration. A hastily formed corporation associated with political insiders bought cinders for five cents a ton from the Monongahela Power Co. plant at Willow Island, Pleasants County, mixed in calcium chloride, and sold them to the State Road Commission for \$5.31 a ton. Previously, the power plant had given the cinders to the SRC free.

Sawyers and Johnkoski remained potent Democrats after the indictments. While awaiting the start of the bribery trial, Sawyers was chosen by Rep. John M. Slack Jr., D-W.Va., to be his alternate delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and Johnkoski was picked as alternate delegate by state Sen. Carl Gainer, D-Nicholas. Sawyers and Johnkoski couldn't attend, however, because they were on trial when the convention started.

As for ex-Gov. Barron, the bribery indictment dashed the possibility he might become governor again. In the fall of 1967, a movement had been organized to boost him for another term in the Capitol, and he hinted in speeches that he might run.

A "State Citizens Committee for Barron for Governor" published full-page newspaper ads in his behalf.

The movement faltered somewhat in December when the national Drew Pearson column charged that, during Barron's term as governor, Bonn Brown conveyed to him \$50,000 in fees from coal industry sources, at a time when the coal industry was seeking permission to build a coal slurry pipeline across the state. Barron called the column a "vicious rumor...asinine lie."

(Later, it was learned that Barron's wife had a huge checking account listed by her middle name at a Pittsburgh bank from 1962 until the end of the governor's term in 1965. At one time, the account listed her address as "care of Bonn Brown, attorney, P.O. Box 511, Elkins, W.Va."

The Feb. 13 indictment made blazing headlines next morning and was dubbed another "St. Valentine's Day Massacre."

The trial began Aug. 13, 1968, in the new federal building in Charleston. Jurors were locked up each night in rooms at the Daniel Boone Hotel.

The prosecution opened by presenting two trust agreements signed by all six defendants saying they would "share equally in all profits" from an undertaking. U.S. agents said the agreements had been found in car dealer Schroath's safety deposit box in Clarksburg.

A prosecutor charged that the Florida corporations which Brown and Schroath set up to receive funds were "nothing but post office boxes."

Businessmen began testifying that they had inquired about increasing state orders, and they



were instructed to send money to one or more of the dummy corporations — after which, their state business increased noticeably.

James Render of a Pennsylvania stone firm said his company paid 10 cents a ton to a dummy Florida firm on stone sales to the state, and later switched to a \$1,000-a-month retainer fee to Bonn Brown.

Marlin C. Sherbine of another Pennsylvania stone firm said his company and an associated firm sent more than \$8,000 in checks to one of the Florida corporations.

Lee Frasier, president of New River Supply Co. at Oak Hill, testified that he signed a contract to pay Schroath “whatever the services were worth” for getting more state bid proposals.

John F. Secret of Clarksburg Wholesale Furniture Co. said his firm and an allied company sent \$4,500 to the Florida corporations in keeping with an agreement to pay five percent on all sales to the state.

Joseph P. Hall of B&H Tire Supply Corp. of Buckhannon testified that his firm sent \$2,400 to the Ohio and Florida corporations.

M.C. Paterno, owner of Park Tire Co. in Charleston, testified that he sent \$1,500 to a Florida corporation through an agreement with Schroath.

William Armstrong Smith of a Georgia paint firm said he sent \$29,000 to the Florida corporations for paint sales to West Virginia.

Robert L. McClintic of Frazee Lumber Co. said his firm sold 3,500 acres of land in Wetzel County to the Department of Natural Resources for the Lewis Wetzel Public Hunting Area. The purchase price was \$111,550, and McClintic said he sent \$7,500 to one

of the Florida corporations as Bonn Brown's fee for helping with the sale. Gov. Barron signed an order for purchase of the land.

Two representatives of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co. testified they had sales agreements with John Ruckman of Wheeling, former Ohio County Democratic chairman, and Porter Supply Co. of Huntington. Through the agreements, they said, MMM paid about \$25,000 in fees in return for sales to the state of West Virginia.

Ruckman testified that he divided his MMM fees with Bonn Brown. He also told of another incident in which he called Brown in behalf of an equipment firm wanting to sell highway rollers to the State Road Commission. The SRC bought 20 rollers for \$100,000, Ruckman said, and the equipment firm paid him a \$28,000 commission, of which he sent \$9,000 to one of the Florida corporations.

The most explosive witness was Isadore Lashinsky of Charleston, president of Southern Culvert Corp. and several allied firms. He testified that his firms made 16 payments totaling more than \$25,000 to one of the Florida corporations in return for state purchases of road-building materials. Also, he said, he gave \$50,000 in cash to Vincent Johnkoski in the SRC offices in Charleston.

Lashinsky said his written agreement with the Florida corporation called for him to pay eight percent of all sales to the state. He said Finance Commissioner Gore told him that, for him to get a certain contract, the state would need three competing bids to comply with state law. Lashinsky said he told Gore he could "take care of that," and had three

of his own firms bid.

In the second day of his testimony, Lashinsky made even stronger claims. He said he gave Gov. Hulett Smith \$10,000 in cash in person as a “campaign contribution.” He said he kept Luther Carson, director of SRC office services and a powerful Kanawha County Democrat, on his payroll at \$500 a month. He said he paid assistant state purchasing director Fred M. Merchant two percent of his entire gross sales to the state.

Lashinsky testified he made the payments throughout the Smith administration — up until the bribery conspiracy indictment was returned and he was dropped from the official state vendor list along with other suppliers mentioned in the indictment. Lashinsky’s firms sold more than \$1 million worth of highway materials and other supplies to the state, altogether.

The defense in the trial pointed out that Lashinsky was himself under indictment on a charge of evading \$50,000 in income taxes. Lawyers implied that he had deliberately waited to be granted immunity, then invented the story of the bribes as an explanation of where large amounts of money had gone in an effort to clear himself of the tax-evasion charge.

When the prosecution rested, the defense pulled a surprise by offering no witnesses or evidence. During summations, the defense said the Florida operation had been a legitimate business to provide “expert service” to help bidders cut through red tape in dealing with bureaucracy.

The prosecution damned the operation as a scheme of “avarice, greed and kickbacks.” A prose-

cutor said the Florida firms consisted of nothing but “post office box numbers and very fat bank accounts.” He said the people of West Virginia lost vast amounts of money — \$100,000 just on the purchase of highway centerline paint on an emergency basis from kickback-paying firms.

U.S. Attorney Milton Ferguson scoffed at the claim by bidders that they were paying only legitimate commissions. “They knew they couldn’t get any state business until they started paying kickbacks,” he said.

Referring to the fact that Bonn Brown had been chairman of Gov. Barron’s statewide cleanup campaign — which used the slogan, “Keep West Virginia Clean and Green” — Ferguson said the slogan of the kickback operation might have been “Pick West Virginia Clean and Keep Florida Green.”

The trial lasted 15 days. The jury took two more, spending 18 hours in deliberation. Then it found Barron innocent and the others guilty.

On Oct. 4, 1968, Judge Martin sentenced Brown and Schroath to four years in federal prison each, and fined each of them \$10,000. He sentenced Sawyers and Johnkoski to two years each; and \$5,000 fines.

Meanwhile, the Internal Revenue Service filed civil income tax claims in U.S. Tax Court in Washington against all six of the defendants. The IRS said Barron owed \$20,000, Brown \$76,000, Sawyers \$17,000, Jonkoski \$14,600, Gore, \$14,500 and Schroath \$21,649.

### **Marshall West**

The seventh in the series was a political issue first and a court case second.

In the fall of 1968, amid heat of the gubernatorial campaign, GOP nominee Arch Moore announced that two Democratic state officials had been dismissed because 100,000 cigarette tax stamps worth \$6,000 were missing in the state Tax Department. He said the two had been fired six months earlier, but the Smith administration had kept it a secret.

The administration acknowledged the dismissals, but said the loss had been recovered and information had been turned over to the Kanawha County prosecutor's office.

Involved were Chester P. Tinsley, director of the cigarette, soft drink and license division; and Marshall G. West, an assistant attorney general assigned to the Tax Department.

Tinsley, from Huntington, had been appointed under Gov. Barron in 1961 and retained under Gov. Smith. In 1967, he was elected president of the National Tobacco Tax Assn.

West, from Pineville, had been elected to the House of Delegates from Wyoming County in 1958 and 1960, joined the legal staff of the Tax Department in 1961, and became an assistant attorney general under C. Donald Robertson in 1963.

West told newsmen a dramatic story of how the stamps disappeared. A cigarette tax metering machine had been stolen at Shinnston, he said, and later he got a call from a Wyoming countian he once knew who said he had the machine and would exchange it for individual stamps.

Since the loss of the machine was potentially more dangerous than loss of stamps, West said he asked Tinsley for a carton of 100,000 stamps "to use

in an investigation.” West said he had been instructed to leave the stamps in his parked car at Kanawha Airport, and the machine would be left in place of the stamps. The stamps vanished on schedule, West said, but the machine wasn’t returned.

West said an underworld gang was involved in the affair, and that one of the gangsters called him later and said the stamps would be left in a locker at the Greyhound bus station in Charleston. Only \$5,300 worth of stamps were returned, he said, so he paid for the \$700 loss himself.

Nonetheless, a Kanawha County grand jury indicted West and Tinsley.

Meanwhile, West was charged with aiming a pistol at a “Youth For Moore” group at restaurant east of Charleston. He was indicted on a charge of brandishing a deadly weapon.

West was convicted of embezzling tax stamps and sentenced to prison in 1969.

### **Fred Wilmoth**

Eighth in the indictment parade was Fred M. Wilmoth of Vienna, Wood County, charged with two counts of income tax evasion. The indictment said he concealed \$44,000 income in 1962 and 1963 — two years of the Barron administration.

Wilmoth was a long-time friend of Barron and was in the real estate business with him. Wilmoth traveled extensively with Barron during the 1960 campaigns and later was a frequent visitor at the governor’s office. Through his association with Barron, Wilmoth was appointed to the state Democratic finance committee.

Barron was inaugurated in January, 1961. A month

later, Wilmoth was put on the payroll of Schenley distillery as “regional trade relations manager.” (During the Elmore trial at Bluefield, Wilmoth testified that his salary from Schenley was \$900 a month.)

In 1963, during a civil suit involving his real estate business at Parkersburg, Wilmoth was questioned in a court deposition. It contained this passage.

“Q. When did you receive that employment by Schenley . . . ?

“A. February, 1961.

“Q. And you perform some service for that company known as Schenley monopoly, do you not?

“A. No, sir.

“Q. Do you receive that money for doing nothing?

“A. Yes, sir.”

Elsewhere in the deposition, Wilmoth testified that he never saw anyone from Schenley except “when I signed up in February, 1961.” He also testified that he spent a week with Gov. Barron at the Greenbrier resort hotel, but didn’t pay for it. Asked who did, he replied: “Either the C&O or Gov. Barron. I don’t know which.”

Wilmoth also became involved in the sale of land for a federally insured, low-rent housing project on Hanna Drive in North Charleston. He bought a defunct land company and sold a tract for the housing center. A Charleston councilman warned of rumors saying Barron was involved in the sale, but Wilmoth denied it.

*(This is a condensation of a special Gazette section published May 16, 1969.)*

**AFTERMATH:** Fallout from the Barron scandals continued for years, pulling many, many West



Virginia officials into prison. Here is a rogues' gallery:

In 1969, aide Curt Trent was indicted in a statewide car theft ring. The same year, he was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to three years in prison, but served just five months. He died in 2002 at age 82.

In 1970, a Kanawha grand jury charged Barron, Gore and others with 107 counts of rigging state purchases — and controversial Charleston businessman Raymond George testified that he gave them bags of cash at the Statehouse.

In 1971, new federal charges said Barron had given a \$25,000 bribe to the jury foreman in his 1968 trial to hold out for an innocent verdict for the ex-governor. The jury foreman, Ralph Buckalew, pleaded guilty and went to prison. Barron likewise pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 25 years, a term later cut to 12. Barron spent only three years in a U.S. lockup. He never returned to West Virginia, and died in 2002 at age 90.

Also in 1971, C. Donald Robertson, who had been attorney general during the Barron years, was charged with helping arrange bribes to the state's federal housing director, James F. Haught, in the Hanna Drive housing project and others. Deputy Attorney General Philip Graziani, who had been listed as an "unindicted coconspirator" in the housing mess, was shot in the head outside his Charleston home just before he was to testify against them. Local thugs, allegedly hired by other parties in the case, were convicted. The following year, Robertson pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in federal prison. Haught pleaded guilty and drew three

years. Graziani died in 1992, Robertson in 1996.

Also in 1971, state Sen. Bernard Smith, D-Logan, who had been Gov. Barron's welfare commissioner, was convicted with four other Logan politicians on vote-buying charges. All were sent to federal prison. Smith died in 1995.

In 1972, Fred Wilmoth was tried in Fairmont on charges that he had been a "bag man" for Gov. Barron. He allegedly kept political bribe cash in an ammunition box under his bed. Wilmoth was convicted on one count and cleared on another. Later, he was convicted again in regard to the Hanna Drive housing complex, which was abandoned in ruins.

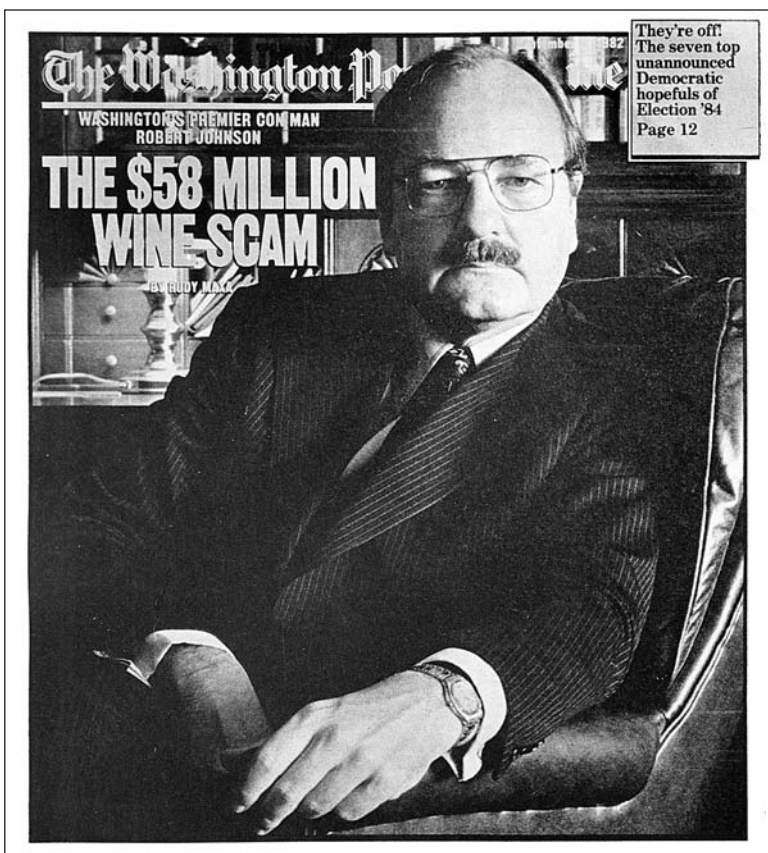
In 1973, Barron's former law partner, Bonn Brown, was given another five-year sentence for helping arrange the \$25,000 bribe to the jury foreman in the historic 1968 corruption trial.

In 1975, longtime state Treasurer John Kelly, who served during the Barron and subsequent eras, went to prison for accepting bribes from state bankers. Kelly died in 1991.

In 1979, Alex Dandy, central figure in the flood cleanup scandal, pleaded guilty to bank fraud in Cleveland. In 1992, he drew a 25-year sentence and \$42 million fine for fraud in a Michigan grocery chain. Dandy died in 2003.

In 1991, businessman Raymond George, who previously carried bags of money to Barron officials at the Statehouse, was sentenced to probation in a North Carolina bank fraud, along with former state tax commissioner Don Carman.

In 2002, Sawyers, Barron's highways chief who was convicted in the landmark 1968 trial, died at age 90.



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**"Premier con man" is the title bestowed on Charleston's Robert Dale Johnson by this Washington Post magazine cover in September 1982.**

# The Portuguese wine fraud

The prophet Jeremiah railed: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” But it ain’t necessarily so. Most people I’ve known through the years have been honest and trustworthy.

However, an occasional clinker shows up, catching everyone by surprise. An example popped into the news recently. Bradford Bleidt, popular son of a Charleston civic couple, had seemed a shining success as head of a Boston investment firm. Then he attempted suicide and confessed to filching tens of millions from his longtime clients.

Looking back over my half-century at the *Gazette*, I recall another spectacular case: a legendary con artist who victimized many affluent Charlestonians, then moved to Washington and victimized more.

Robert Dale Johnson was a popular, personable Charleston telephone executive — until he pulled the \$58 million “Portuguese wine fraud.” Here’s the tale:

Born in 1934, only son of a Union Carbide chemical engineer, Johnson was a choirboy and promising young man. He graduated in 1956 from the University of Charleston (then Morris Harvey College), married a hometown girl and went to work in the accounting department of the phone company (then Chesapeake and Potomac). He taught a Baptist Sunday school class and was well-liked. Once he was described as “everybody’s next-door neighbor.”

Johnson developed some minor debt problems. One day in 1964, at lunch with the late Charleston lawyer Andy Raptis, he suddenly concocted a scheme to get money. ("It just came out of me," he later claimed.) Johnson told Raptis he had foreign contacts and could import Tunisian birdcages at a great profit. Raptis agreed to invest \$5,000, and Johnson signed a contract promising him a handsome return. Johnson ordered no birdcages. He simply used the money to erase his debts.

Soon, Raptis's law partner, the late Jack Friedman, called and asked to get in on the lucrative investment. Johnson took his money as well. Six months later, the phone executive obtained a bank loan and paid impressive "earnings" to Raptis and Friedman. Word spread covertly among their friends, who wanted in on the sweet deal.

Johnson expanded his scheme. He told the lawyers he could import low-grade wine from Portugal and sell it to salad dressing makers at huge profit. They and others bit, and again he paid them fat returns — although he never imported any wine.

Word spread like wildfire among local investors. Wealthy Charlestonians, and some of their not-so-wealthy employees, were eager to participate in the confidential "hot deal" that was the topic of intense gossip. It "generated electric excitement" around West Virginia, banker I.N. "Ike" Smith later testified at a trial.

Johnson took the new investment money and used part of it to pay stunning returns to previous investors — triggering more clandestine gossip and drawing still more investors. It was a classic Ponzi

scheme, named for the legendary Charles Ponzi who reaped millions in the 1920s by promising investors 50 percent return — using new investment cash to pay fake earnings to previous plungers.

Several investors, unaware of the fraud, became agents collecting further investments from friends, some taking commissions before passing the cash to Johnson. One agent was Joseph M. Holt Jr. of Lewisburg. Another was Frank “Buddy” Mower, heir to the Mower Lumber Co. fortune, who lived mostly at Virginia Beach. Their friends practically stood in line, eager to get in on the secret gold mine.

Why did so many rush to hand over money without checking? Partly because it was hush-hush and mysterious, a tantalizing word-of-mouth operation known only to a select few. Years later, Johnson told *The Washington Post*:

“Anyone who has spent much time involved in financial markets knows that insider trading goes on every day, irrespective of securities laws. Everyone understands — it’s the delicious feeling of being inside.”

Johnson bought elegant Charleston homes and cars, and sank money into several Charleston businesses. Then he moved to Washington and expanded. He became owner of a stripper club and befriended Washington big-shots. One introduced him to the late Sen. Jennings Randolph, who was charmed by him and arranged for him to be appointed a trustee of Salem College, Randolph’s alma mater.

Brazenly, Johnson wrote to his investors: “I’m certain that from time to time, you have suspected a

‘catch’ in the wine deal. Well, your suspicions are well-founded. I would appreciate a gift from you of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to Salem College.” Sen. Randolph said Johnson raised \$80,000 for Salem from 30 donors.

Then a trifle caused the house of cards to collapse. In Virginia Beach, a doctor prepared to invest \$50,000, but asked first if the wine contracts might be considered unregistered securities. To find out, agent Mower phoned a Virginia securities official. Then the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission heard.

In 1974, the SEC filed a complaint accusing Johnson of collecting \$26 million worth of investments in a wine business that didn’t exist. It was a bombshell that stunned many in West Virginia and neighbor states. Bitter lawsuits were filed. Bankruptcies were filed. Banks lost heavily, and a Virginia bank president was fired. One ruined woman reportedly committed suicide. Later tallies expanded the swindle to \$58 million.

One formerly wealthy young man complained in court that his inheritance had been wiped out. The judge dryly said he must get a job like ordinary folks.

Lewisburg lawyer George Lemon sued agent Holt and forced him to pay part of the losses of Greenbrier countians. Lemon says he doesn’t like to remember the awful time — “It was a nightmare.”

Johnson pleaded guilty and served four years in a federal prison. The last I heard of him, in the 1980s, he was in Washington, working as a business consultant.

The Portuguese wine fraud holds the record as

West Virginia's biggest scam, I'm sure. It showed the severe damage a lone person can cause by lying.

Although Jeremiah was wrong about every human heart being deceitful, he was correct in a following verse: "He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool."

*(Published Dec. 14, 2004)*



# The Buffalo Creek tragedy

One terrible day in 1972, the world got a sickening lesson in what an unsupervised industry could do to defenseless families.

The Buffalo Creek tragedy — caused by rupture of a coal company's illegal, makeshift, unlicensed, unstable chain of "gob pile" dams — killed 125 Logan countians, injured 1,000 and left 4,000 homeless amid sodden debris. It destroyed a 15-mile valley, wrecking more than 1,000 homes, 1,000 vehicles, 30 businesses, ten bridges and miles of roads.

As the *Gazette's* investigative reporter in those days, I tried (unsuccessfully) to solve three puzzles.

The first was why leaders of Pittston's Buffalo Mining Co. didn't warn Buffalo Creek residents of looming danger.

During the rainy night before the collapse, Buffalo Mining superintendent Daniel "Steve" Dasovich made several worried trips to the oozing, shaky dam. At daybreak, apprehensive neighbors said Dasovich told them that workers "had channeled the water up there, and everything's going to be all right."

After the horror, Dasovich vanished. I tried to locate him, but couldn't. He later testified that he woke up sedated in Man Memorial Hospital, went to Florida for 10 days, then went for back surgery at a Huntington hospital. He also testified that there had been no "channeling" that might have triggered the dam break.

Dasovich and his 10-year-old son were killed in a 1977 crash at a little Logan airport, along with the

pilot of their small plane. The pilot's daughter, Carrie Huff of Charleston, says her family always wondered if the craft was shot down by one of the many people who felt great bitterness toward Dasovich.

The second puzzle was why no criminal charges were brought against Buffalo Mining executives for creating crude dams by dumping coal mine waste into the muck of a creek bed.



Gazette aerial photo by Ferrell Friend

**Logan County homes were jammed like matchboxes against a railway bridge by the historic flood's awesome force.**

Oval Damron, then Logan prosecutor, said failure to get a state dam license was only a misdemeanor, and the one-year statute of limitations for prosecution had lapsed. He said Buffalo Mining couldn't be charged with negligent homicide because "there's no way to put a corporation in jail." Circuit Judge Harvey Oakley appointed two special prosecutors, but their grand jurors found no grounds for an indictment.

The third and greatest puzzle — one that even legislative hearings couldn't solve — was why corrupt

Gov. Arch Moore accepted a \$1 million settlement from Pittston as complete payment for the state government's loss in the disaster, leaving West Virginia taxpayers stuck for up to \$13 million in unpaid costs.

Personally, I've always figured that something shady lurked behind this odd action. Why else would Moore have done it? A federal judge ruled, in effect, that the ex-governor lied under oath about the affair. But no clear explanation ever emerged.

The mystery came to public light when Miles Dean, finance commissioner in the Rockefeller administration, asked me to come to the Statehouse and look at some baffling records. From them, this story emerged:

The unlicensed dam had been built by former Logan County Democratic faction leader A.D. "Buster" Skaggs, who backed Republican Moore in elections. When Skaggs sold his Buffalo Mining Co. to Pittston, the dam became Pittston's responsibility.

After the 1972 tragedy, Gov. Moore's emergency director asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to perform recovery work at state expense. The corps repeatedly billed the state \$3.7 million, but Moore kept the invoices confidential and didn't pay them.

The Legislature ordered then-Attorney General Chauncey Browning to sue Pittston for damage to the state's roads, bridges and other facilities. For the task, Browning retained Charleston lawyer Stanley Preiser, who later became Moore's personal defense attorney. Preiser sued Pittston for \$100 million.

Five years later — just three days before his term ended in 1977 — Moore signed a settlement accepting \$1 million from Pittston and absolving the firm of further liability. Only a week earlier, the Corps of Engineers had sent him a registered letter saying it

would sue the state for the \$3.7 million.

After the Rockefeller administration took office, aides were jolted to discover the Corps of Engineers' bills. Browning and Preiser said they hadn't known of the debt while they were suing Pittston.

Flabbergasted legislators held hearings, but couldn't get a straight answer from Moore as to why he hadn't required Pittston to pay the corps costs.

A corps lawsuit against the state dragged on, with interest on the debt growing by \$2,000 a day. Moore testified in a deposition that he got a corps letter about the debt — then testified at a trial that he didn't get it. Federal Judge Norman Ramsey noted that one of his statements was false.

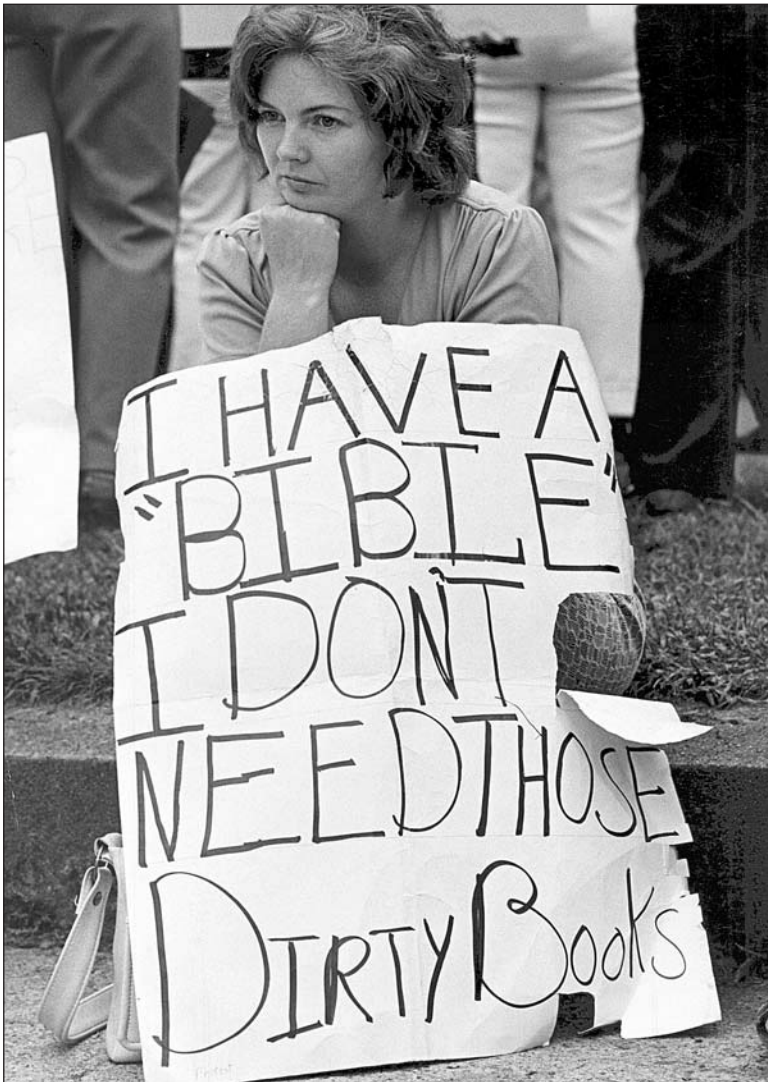
By 1987, the state had lost in U.S. District Court, U.S. Circuit Court and the U.S. Supreme Court. West Virginia was ordered to pay the \$3.7 million plus about \$10 million interest.

Attorney General Charlie Brown negotiated with the corps, which agreed to accept a total of \$9.5 million (which included payment for another small flood cleanup). In 1989, taxpayers coughed up this reduced amount.

Soon afterward, Moore was convicted of corruption and sent to federal prison. New Attorney General Roger Tompkins sued the ex-governor to recover the public's losses caused by his crimes. Moore finally gave the state \$750,000 in 1995 — but this restitution didn't cover the Buffalo Creek mess, because he never was accused in that affair.

Thus, three disturbing questions still remain unanswered regarding West Virginia's worst manmade flood.

*(Published March 1, 1997)*



*Gazette-Mail* file photo

**Hundreds of protesters with signs like this filled Charleston's streets during the famous 1974 uprising against "godless textbooks."**

# The great Kanawha holy war

Millionaire evangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell want America's 50 million fundamentalists to become a mighty political force and reshape society to their liking. Well, we'd better pray that their effort doesn't turn out like a famous Kanawha County example: the 1974 war against "godless textbooks."

Rock-throwing mobs forced schools to close. Two schools and the Board of Education office were bombed. Two people were shot. Coal miners struck to support the religious protest. Ku Klux Klansmen and right-wing kooks flocked to Charleston. Some upriver residents tried to form a separate county. A preacher and his followers discussed murdering families who wouldn't join a school boycott. The minister finally went to prison.

During this nightmare, Charleston acquired a national image somewhat like Dayton, Tenn., home of the "Scopes monkey trial," the 1925 evolution clash.

Ironically, the whole Kanawha insurrection was pointless, because the school books were just routine texts. Their sins existed only in the fevered imagination of the zealots.

The upheaval was rooted in the period when religious conservatives rebelled against liberal excesses of the 1960s. The first to jump into the limelight was the Rev. Charles Meadows of Elkview, who went before the Legislature in 1969 to demand a return of the death penalty. He testified that he would "be glad to pull the switch myself" at executions.

Then he attacked sex education in Kanawha schools. He rented the Civic Center theater and invited “Bible-believing Christians” to a rally against the “pornography” of sex education. Committees were formed. A movement grew.



*Gazette-Mail* file photo

**Outside the Kanawha County school system headquarters on Elizabeth Street, protesters demanded removal of books they considered sinful.**

Alice Moore, wife of a St. Albans pastor, became the movement’s candidate for the school board in 1970. She said sex education was part of a “humanistic, atheistic attack on God.” Church groups poured money into her campaign. She won and became the board’s ayatollah, supporting Bibles for students and expulsion of pregnant girls.

Moore’s moralizing had minor effect until 1974, when new textbooks were up for adoption. She denounced the books as irreligious, and a protest grew. A group of 27 born-again clergymen called the



texts “immoral and indecent.” (Rascals like me hunted for indecency in the books, but found only ordinary school topics.)

On the night of the adoption vote, 1,000 protesters surrounded the board office. Despite this menace, members voted 3-2 for the books. Afterward, a group called Christian American Parents picketed Heck’s stores because Heck’s president Russell Isaacs, a board member, had voted yes.

When school opened, evangelists urged “true Christians” to keep their children home. Attendance fell 20 percent, moreso in the poor eastern end of the county. The Rev. Marvin Horan led a rally of 2,000 protesters in Campbells Creek. Mobs surrounded schools and blockaded school bus garages. Teachers were threatened. So were families who didn’t join the boycott.

About 3,500 coal miners went on strike against the texts, and began picketing Charleston industries.

Flying rocks, screams and danger were constant. Frightened people in eastern Kanawha began carrying pistols. Many school buses couldn’t run — and then textbook pickets halted city buses, leaving 11,000 low-income Kanawha Valley people without transportation.

Pickets surrounded a truck terminal, and a terminal janitor fired a shot which wounded one. Other pickets beat the janitor savagely. The next day, an armed man panicked when pickets surged toward him. He fired a shot that wounded a bystander. Two book protesters were jailed for smashing windshields.

The school board got a court injunction against disrupters, but it didn’t help. Finally the superintendent closed schools, saying the safety of children





*Gazette-Mail file photo*

**Midway Elementary School in the upper Kanawha Valley was shattered by dynamite thrown through a window by “godless text-book” protesters.**

couldn't be guaranteed. Schools also closed in Boone and Fayette counties.

Network TV crews swarmed to Charleston. A cameraman was trounced by protesters at a Campbells Creek rally. The Rev. Ezra Graley led a march on the state Capitol and filed a federal suit against the textbooks. Graley and other ministers were jailed for contempt of the court injunction.

Schools reopened. The boycott resumed. The Rev. Charles Quigley prayed for God to kill the board members who endorsed the books. A grade school was hit by a Molotov cocktail. Five shots hit a school bus. A dynamite blast damaged another grade school. A bigger blast damaged the school central office.

Near-riot conditions continued. Robert Dornan of California, a pornography foe, addressed a crowd of 3,000. He was sent to Charleston by Citizens for Decency Through Law, a national censorship group

led by savings-and-loan king Charles Keating. Dornan later went to Congress, and Keating went to prison for fraud.

Protesters started born-again schools. Magistrate Patsy McGraw led an attempt to make eastern Kanawha a separate county.

Minister Horan and three of his followers were indicted for the bombings. Ku Klux Klan leaders led a Charleston rally to support them. An imperial wizard from Georgia said the Kanawha textbooks contained “the most vulgar, vile and filthy words in print” — which was odd, since non-fundamentalists couldn’t find any obscenities in them.

During the trial in 1975, other followers said Horan had led the dynamite plot, telling them there was “a time to kill.” They said the plotters talked of wiring dynamite caps into the gas tanks of cars in which families were driving their children to school during the boycott. All four defendants went to federal prison.

Horan’s conviction ended the protest. Other leaders lost face. Minister Meadows left his church after admitting involvement with a woman religion teacher. Minister Graley’s wife left him and he sued to recover the luxury car she took. School board member Moore abruptly left the state.

Looking back, it was a season of madness — a frenzy over nothing, like the ferment among believers who thought the moon-and-stars logo on Procter & Gamble soap was a secret sign of Satan. The Kanawha chaos showed how zealots can turn trivia into tragedy. It made the holy wars of India and elsewhere a bit more comprehensible.

*(Published Oct. 12, 1993)*



The DC-6 is a four-engine aircraft with speed capabilities of 250 mph and range of 2,500 miles. It weighs 52,000 pounds.



Workers rest on piles of marijuana in front of the smoldering debris.

requests served. And we have to drive what they're carrying when they come in.

A spokesman for Eagle Aviation warns that the plane planned to make the dropoff before Executive Air, because they don't have night severity. We do have a night guard and a night attendant, and although it's none of our business what anybody carries in an airplane, if a plane that large had parked on our ramp at that time, we would have called customs officials.

Ryder truck rental spokesman here and in Houston said they had no trucks out on Tuesday night. They said the trucks may have been rented from out of state.

## Drug Hub Worries Repeated

A year ago Mayor Hutchinson and his wife visited Mexico that Kato who Airport might become a narco-traffic smuggling hub because it's an of fiscal U.S. port of entry with most Customs Service inspection.

At that time federal drug agents here said there was little chance of it.

Last July a cargo plane en route to Charleston was forced to return to the airport in Houston.



Tons of marijuana were scattered over the hillside.

who Airport as an easy shot. If you were flying a planehead from Mexico, would you want to land at Miami where they have an army of customs agents and drug sniffing dogs, or would you rather come up here in

Wednesday. Mrs. Hutchinson said she heard through police that no customs agents were on duty at the airport at 1 a.m. when a cargo craft crashed while attempting to land with 10 tons of marijuana. "There

The customs personnel here do an excellent job," he told a Gazette reporter last. "This isn't a high traffic area, so they have time to check the incoming planes thoroughly."

**Gazette news coverage on June 7, 1979, showed the type of aircraft that crashed, plus the smoldering wreckage strewn below Yeager Airport.**

# The legendary Pot Plane saga

Oddball news events occur from time to time in West Virginia — and one of the wildest was the historic Pot Plane crash of 1979.

The caper involved a bizarre cast, including some moviemakers who, believe it or not, eventually got out of jail and won an Academy Award.

The tale began after midnight on a summer night. An old Douglas DC-6 cargo plane, four propellers whirring, approached Yeager (then Kanawha) Airport and radioed for permission to land. Tower operators didn't know that the darkness-shrouded craft contained 12 tons of marijuana.

Inside the plane were three young men in their 20s: The pilot, David Seesing, a former Eagle Scout, was a Texas aircraft salesman who lived with the daughter of President Nixon's ambassador to Australia. The co-pilot, Dana Anderson, previously served drug terms in Morocco and Colombia, and had vanished from New York after his name surfaced in the murder of a top model's lover.

Waiting on the ground in yellow Ryder rental trucks, ready to unload the cargo, were five others including Leon Jacques Gast and Shahbaz "Shane" Zarintash. Gast was a movie producer who called his company Gassed Films. Zarintash was an Iranian immigrant who had attended West Virginia Tech and worked as an engineer for the state Division of Highways.

Also nearby, in an unmarked police car, was

Kanawha County sheriff's deputy Mark Chadwick. His father, Sgt. Jim Chadwick, was at the county police headquarters.

Then the plan went haywire. The DC-6 touched down, but gunned its engines in a doomed attempt to climb. The craft plummeted down a hillside, ripping apart, spewing 400 or so 50-pound bales of pot, and catching fire. The crew jumped for their lives. One of the four engines reached Keystone Drive in the valley far below. Bales hung in treetops and ruptured down the slope.

Police and emergency crews roared to the airport. Officers found Anderson staggering along a road, injured. Nearby were Seesing and the third crewman, muddy and bloody. At first, they told police they had been fighting.

Radio alarms were flashed around Kanawha Valley. Police soon caught the others in the fleeing Ryder trucks. Later, charges were filed against the father-and-son deputies, Jim and Mark Chadwick, accusing them of aiding the smuggling plot.

Sightseers began looting the spilled pot, and 15 were arrested. Police doused the bales with fuel oil, trying to burn them, and sprayed the hillside with herbicide. National Guardsmen patrolled the site. Some bales were buried — then dug up again after looters tried digging. It was a mess.

Trials finally began the following winter. Four suspects pleaded guilty, including director Gast. He said he and Zarintash imported the pot to get money for a documentary movie they were making about a boxing match by Muhammad Ali in Africa.

Other defendants sweated through months of

courtroom delays. It was called the “snow-to-roses trial” because it stretched into summer.

One defense attorney, Edwin Kagin of Kentucky, lived in a tent at Kanawha State Forest. Nearby, another defense lawyer, Richard Chosid, stayed in a camper. Also tenting was an investigator, disbarred lawyer Harry Shelor. They said they were saving defense costs for clients.

When verdicts finally came down, four more smugglers were convicted, and all got five-year sentences. Sgt. Chadwick was found innocent, and his son’s trial ended with a hung jury.

More court struggles ensued. Out-of-state bankrollers of the plot were indicted and convicted. Some verdicts were set aside, and the smugglers convicted again.

Young Deputy Chadwick finally was acquitted — even though three of the smugglers testified that he had been their lookout. Then-Sheriff Danny Jones said Chadwick “walked into my office after the verdict, demanded to see me, and asked for six years back pay.” The ex-deputy filed several appeals seeking more than \$100,000 from taxpayers, but the *Gazette* and others protested, and his effort failed.

Meanwhile, lawyers bit the dust. One bankroller who pleaded guilty was Florida lawyer Frederick Shapiro. Then defense lawyer Chosid was convicted in a Michigan pot-smuggling scheme. Worst of all, ex-lawyer Harry Shelor, who had served as an investigator, drew a death sentence for murdering a state trooper who discovered his Kentucky pot patch.

Another weird twist happened a year after the crash, when lawyer Jon Duncan came to a Monroe

County bank with a garbage bag containing \$58,000 in small bills. The money was deposited in the attorney's escrow account. Later, \$42,600 more was brought in a fishing tackle box. Four other deliveries raised the total to \$157,000.

Federal agents said the money came from the Pot Plane plot. They charged the bank with failing to obey a law requiring disclosure of cash deposits greater than \$10,000. Then-Federal Judge Elizabeth Hallanan remarked that "\$58,000 in small bills in a garbage bag is not routine."

The bank paid a fine. One of the marijuana smugglers and a Monroe County man he had met in Kanawha County jail — a psychotic who had shot his girlfriend to death in the Kanawha County welfare office — were convicted in 1986 for this money mess.

The Pot Plane caper seemed over. Then an epilogue occurred. Director Gast finally finished his film about Muhammad Ali, titled *When We Were Kings* — and it won a 1997 Oscar for best documentary.

The lawyer who lived in a tent, Kagin, son of a Presbyterian minister, today is a leader in national agnostic groups.

In the news business, we watch a lot of strange stories unfold. This one was a classic.

*(Published Oct. 13, 2003)*



**Sheriff Carl Withrow at his jail -- where he gladly would have put Gazette editors, if he could. (Gazette-Mail photo by Kenny Kemp)**

# Politicians with something to hide

In the bad old days, a shoddy West Virginia politician could commit an affront, be sued for it, pay a bundle of taxpayer money to end the suit -- and hide the loss from the public in a secret settlement.

A Gazette crusade in the 1980s halted this type of concealment. It's a long story, as follows:

Carl Withrow ran for Kanawha County sheriff in 1980. He was dynamic and college-educated. He seemed worthy. Our newspaper endorsed him. He won.



Trouble soon arose. To be his chief deputy, Withrow picked political hack Tommy Carter, who once had confessed to embezzling money from the Marmet state liquor store, but his indictment was dropped on a technicality. Chief Carter was accused of brutality against arrested suspects, giving one a skull fracture. His brother ran a Kanawha City booze club, with Sheriff Withrow as a patron.

In those days, Danny Jones was a popular Charleston restaurant operator. Kanawha deputies chose him to be their representative on the local civil service commission that protects deputies from political pressures. Jones came to me with a sordid story:

A 16-year-old girl had been abducted outside Carter's brother's liquor club and raped. Deputy George Jarrett was assigned to investigate. The girl told Jarrett she previously had been intimate with the middle-aged sheriff. Withrow removed the deputy from the case, and later fired him -- apparently to hide his private misconduct.

Two other deputies involved with the investigation also were fired. Eventually, all three officers sued the sheriff for wrongful dismissal. Their cases dragged on for years.

The scandal grew. Withrow was accused of bungling county records and failing to keep county funds in high-earning accounts. His behavior caused county commissioners to cancel a Sheriff's Youth Camp. The Gazette published an apology for its 1980 endorsement of him. He wrote an apology for accepting the newspaper's endorsement.

The lawsuits by the three deputies were settled out of court -- in secret, with all parties forbidden to reveal the outcome. Then-Gazette Publisher W.E. "Ned" Chilton III exploded at this concealment of public expenditures. He sued to force the settlements out into the daylight. A circuit judge upheld the secrecy, but Chilton appealed to the state Supreme Court.

By that time, Withrow had lost the 1984 Democratic nomination for sheriff -- and Danny Jones had won the Republican nomination. Jones won in the fall, succeeding Withrow in early 1985. Sheriff Jones began repairing the department's money-handling and recordkeeping. He later went on to the Legislature and to Charleston's mayor office.

In 1986, the state Supreme Court returned a landmark ruling in *Daily Gazette Co. v. Withrow*. It said government officials may not hide outcomes of lawsuits against themselves or their agencies. The people own all government departments and pay the salaries of all government officials -- so the people have a right to know what their employees and bureaus are doing. It was another victory in the long struggle against concealment by politicians. It reduced what Hamlet called "the insolence of office."

Opening the Withrow settlements revealed that the three deputies got more than \$150,000 damages from Kanawha County's insurance carriers.

In prior decades, various West Virginia elected officers had been sued for all sorts of misconduct, from sexual messes to money messes -- even wrongful deaths. Their lawyers usually attempted to settle out of court behind a veil of secrecy. But that tactic stopped working in 1986.

When politicians conceal government records, it's wise to ask: What are they hiding?

( published June 2, 2009 )

# Adventures in the Bible Belt

For many years, I was the *Gazette's* religion reporter and, believe me, I met some amazing denizens of Appalachia's Bible Belt.

Does anyone remember Clarence "Tiz" Jones, the evangelist-burglar? Jones had been a West Virginia champion amateur boxer in his youth, but succumbed to booze and evil companions, and spent a hitch in state prison. Then he was converted and became a popular Nazarene revivalist. He roved the state, drawing big crowds, with many coming forward to be saved.

But police noticed a pattern: In towns where Jones preached, burglaries happened. Eventually, officers charged him with a break-in. This caused a backlash among churches. Followers said Satan and his agents were framing the preacher. The Rev. John Hancock, a former *Daily Mail* reporter turned Nazarene pastor, led a "Justice for Tiz Jones" committee. Protest marches were held.

Then Jones was nabbed red-handed in another burglary, and his guilt was clear. He went back to prison.

Another spectacular West Virginia minister was "Dr." Paul Collett, a faith-healer who claimed he could resurrect the dead — if they hadn't been embalmed. Collett set up a big tent in Charleston and drew multitudes, including many in wheelchairs and on crutches. The healer said he had revived a corpse during a previous stop at Kenova. He urged



Photo by the author

**Devout mountain worshippers pick up rattlesnakes and copperheads because the Bible says true believers “shall take up serpents.” Here, S.J. Hammond wields deadly snakes at the Scrabble Creek Church of All Nations near Gauley Bridge.**

believers to bring him bodies of loved ones, before embalming.

Collett moved his show into the old Ferguson Theater and broadcast over Charleston radio stations. One night he said a cancer fell onto the stage. Another night, he said he turned water into wine.

I attended a service and wrote a skeptical account, focusing on his many money collections. After the article appeared, 40 of Collett's followers invaded the *Gazette* newsroom, then on Hale Street. Luckily, it was my day off. The night city editor called police, and also summoned burly printers from the type shop, who backed the throng out the door.

Collett claimed to have 10,000 adherents in Kanawha County. For five years, he collected money to build a 12-doored "Bible Church of All Nations," which was to be "the biggest tabernacle in West Virginia." Then he moved to Canada, leaving not a rack behind.

He returned some years later and preached at a serpent-handling church on Scrabble Creek near Gauley Bridge. (I often wrote about the ardent mountain worshipers who pick up buzzing rattlesnakes and thrust their hands into fire to show their faith. They're earnest and decent people, although they have a high mortality rate during prayer services.)

The leader of the Scrabble Creek church, Elzie Preast — who never took money from members — began to suspect that Dr. Collett was bilking his congregation. In an Old Testament-type showdown, the two ministers scuffled, one shouting "Manifest him, Lord!" and the other yelling "Rebuke the devil!"

Then Dr. Collett vanished for good. Meanwhile,

the serpent churches spawned other tales:

Once a weekly newspaper printed photos of church weddings, including one in which the bride and groom each held a rattler.

Another time, we heard that politicians in a rural county allowed serpent-handlers to meet in the dilapidated courthouse. Some snakes escaped into crevices in the walls — and emerged weeks later, causing bedlam among courthouse employees.

A former University of Charleston sociologist, Dr. Nathan Gerrard, studied the serpent phenomenon. He administered a psychological test to the Scrabble Creek flock, and gave the same test to a nearby Methodist congregation as a control group. The serpent-handlers came out mentally healthier.

Once the great Harvard theologian Harvey Cox accompanied Dr. Gerrard and me to a different serpent church, on Camp Creek in Boone County. When the worshipers began their trancelike “dancing in the spirit,” we were surprised to see Dr. Cox leap up and join the hoofing.

Later, visiting professors accompanied us to a third serpent church, at Fraziers Bottom, Putnam County. One professor’s wife, barely five feet tall, was an opera soprano. The worshipers, whose music usually is the twang of electric guitars, asked her to sing. She stood on the altar rail and trilled an aria from *La Boheme* while the congregation listened respectfully.

During one visit to the Scrabble Creek snake-handling church, I saw something remarkable: the stigmata. A special visitor that evening was a lanky, dark-haired woman from Hepzibah, Harrison County, who

was renowned in Pentecostal circles because she bled from her hands, feet and side during high-voltage emotional worship. She passed around several photos of herself with blood spots. The whole congregation whooped and prayed over her, and purple bruises appeared under the skin of her palms, but blood didn't actually break through that night.

My science-oriented mind attributed the phenomenon to group hysteria. The late Dr. John Blagg of South Charleston accompanied me to serpent churches a few times, and concluded that Pentecostal occurrences such as spouting incomprehensible syllables of "the unknown tongue" arise from a hypnotic trance that engulfs worshippers.

Meanwhile, the parade of colorful evangelists never stopped. One was Charleston faith-healer Henry Lacy, who handed out calling cards saying simply "Lacy the Stranger." He often came into the *Gazette* newsroom to lay hands on reporters to cure their hangovers. When a roguish reporter asked Lacy to cure his hemorrhoids, the healer discreetly laid his hand atop the rascal's head.

Lacy once offered to halt a cold wave in West Virginia, if state officials would return his driver's license, which had been confiscated.

And there was roving healer A.A. Allen, who visited West Virginia with jars containing froglike bodies that he said were demons he had cast out of the sick. He vanished after a revival at Wheeling, and was found dead of alcoholism in a San Francisco hotel room with \$2,300 in his pocket.

(Marjoe Gortner, the boy evangelist who later confessed that his show was a fraud, said Allen once

advised him how to tell when a revival was finished and it was time to go to the next city: “When you can turn people on their head and shake them and no money falls out, then you know God’s saying, ‘Move on, son.’”)

And “the Plastic Eye Miracle,” the Rev. Ronald Coyne, visited the Charleston Civic Center. He was a one-eyed evangelist who said a faith-healer had enabled him to see through his artificial eye. Several of us in the audience wrapped tape over his good eye, and he read items aloud, using his empty eye socket. It seemed legitimate, and I was mystified.

Those were heady days in the Bible Belt — before evangelists created million-dollar TV empires and became ayatollahs of the Republican Party. The holy rovers of yesteryear provided marvelous theater. Today’s mountain religion seems pale in comparison.

*(Published Dec. 7, 1993)*



# Arch Moore's many scandals

During West Virginia's century-and-a-half history, which politician holds the all-time record for the most corruption scandals? It's former Gov. Arch Moore, by a mile.

Ex-Mingo County political boss Johnie Owens said Moore once lay down in the back seat of a car, to avoid being seen by passersby, and "held up \$12,000 and begged me to take it" to induce the county Democratic machine to support the Republican governor in an election.

Controversial coal operator Paul Kizer testified that he and Moore hid in a parked car at night behind Charleston's abandoned incinerator to agree on perjury to tell to federal investigators.

Former campaign manager Tom Craig testified that Moore once handed him a ski cap containing \$100,000 in wads of cash for illicit electioneering.

Suspensions, investigations, indictments and finally prison tainted Moore for 20 years, damaging West Virginia. The *Gazette* was entwined in the process. The paper's late publisher, W.E. "Ned" Chilton III, personally filed an ethics complaint asking the State Bar to disbar the dishonest politician. Here's the long saga:

Back in 1970, midway in his first term as governor, Washington rumors said the Internal Revenue Service had recommended a tax-evasion indictment of Moore, but the Justice Department under Republican President Nixon and Attorney General John Mitchell scuttled it. The rumors faded, and

Moore defeated Democrat Jay Rockefeller in the 1972 gubernatorial race.

In 1973, Moore's former attorney told me the tax-evasion case "was some turkey. It was peanuts — no good. It never should have been brought. We had it thrown out." The *Gazette* printed his sneer, knowing it would anger West Virginia IRS agents who originally performed the probe.

Sure enough, I got a surreptitious phone call from an agent in the regional IRS headquarters at Parkersburg. He asked me to meet him secretly in parked cars at a pulloff at the little Wood County town of Washington south of Parkersburg.

In our furtive meeting, he said the tax evidence against Moore had been powerful, involving \$200,000 in unreported income. He said the lawyer-politician had been executor of the estate of a crotchety hermit, and had found a signed, blank "certificate of assignment" in the hermit's safety box — so he wrote in stock numbers and gave himself 900 Exxon shares from the old man's assets. Also, he said, Moore converted \$80,000 in campaign funds to personal use, and didn't report \$6,000 from a land deal in which a mental defective was cheated out of a fair share.

Through a friendly stockbroker, the *Gazette* obtained a printout of Exxon stock transfers showing that Moore got 900 shares from the hermit, just as the IRS agent secretly said. When we printed this mess, I wrote that it came from a "Washington source," since the leak occurred at the tiny town of Washington.

As the 1970s proceeded, the *Gazette* revealed more Moore machinations — so many that the governor publicly dubbed the paper the "Morning Sick Call."



Gazette photo by Ferrell Friend

**To promote physical fitness for students, Gov. Arch Moore playfully arm-wrestled with Barboursville Elementary School's coach in May, 1971.**

For example, we reported that Diversified Mountaineer Corp., a shady loan firm, lavished expensive entertainment on Moore's banking commissioner, George Jordan, and installed a bank vault in its Kanawha City building while awaiting approval of a state bank charter. Jordan was indicted in 1974 for falsifying state expense accounts, but the case later was dropped on a technicality.

In 1975, Ashland Oil executives confessed to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission that they

had given \$20,000 of corporation funds in cash, in a briefcase, to Moore in his office at the Capitol.

Perjury allegations rose after a nonunion Virginia trucking firm complained that it had won bidding to haul the state's liquor, but the contract abruptly was revoked. In a lawsuit, the governor testified that he knew nothing about the cancellation — but former Teamsters Union local President Eugene Carter testified that he had called Moore and asked him to void the contract.

In 1975, Moore and his top aide, William Loy, were indicted on federal charges of taking a \$25,000 payoff from Diversified Mountaineer's crooked president. Banking Commissioner Jordan was named a co-conspirator. During their 1976 trial, Moore's attorney said in bench conferences that Moore had received \$120,000 in unreported cash in the 1972 election. U.S. Attorney John "Jack" Field III said the amount was \$180,000 — including a \$5,000 blank check that was cashed with the mysterious signature "Amos Jones." A jury acquitted Moore and Loy. The Diversified Mountaineer chief later went to prison.

In 1976, Moore quietly gave West Virginia's license plate contract without bids to an Arkansas businessman with a record of bribe-paying.

In 1977, three days before he left office at the end of his second term, Moore released the Pittston Co. from liability in the historic Buffalo Creek disaster that drowned 125 Logan countians and left 4,000 homeless. His action left West Virginia taxpayers stuck with a \$9.5 million flood cleanup debt owed to the U.S. Corps of Engineers.

In 1977, on his final day in office, Moore had the

state pay \$127,500 for a collection of John Brown papers previously valued at \$50,000, and two of his ex-aides got a \$30,000 commission on the sale.

In 1979, Moore's former alcohol commissioner, Richard Barber, was charged with squeezing campaign money and free booze from distillers. Barber told FBI agents he got more than \$50,000 from liquor firms during the 1972 campaign and took it to Moore. Barber was sentenced to three years in federal prison.

Despite all these stains, Republican Moore remained so popular that West Virginia voters — two-to-one Democratic — elected him to a record-breaking third gubernatorial term in 1984, after Rockefeller served two terms. (State law limits governors to two consecutive terms, but doesn't forbid further terms after an absence from office.) Moore's third term was troubled by strife with the Legislature, and he lost to Democrat Gaston Caperton in 1988.

In 1989, during the fraud trial of Marrowbone Coal Co. executives, witnesses testified that \$80,000 was given to a company engineer, reportedly to be delivered to Moore administration officials to speed up coal permits.

Suddenly, in 1990, Moore pleaded guilty to extortion, tax evasion, mail fraud and obstruction of justice committed during his third term. He confessed that he took \$573,000 from Beckley coal mogul Paul Kizer in return for giving Kizer's firm a \$2 million refund from the state black lung fund. He also admitted getting \$50,000 from Marrowbone, and more from others.

Moore was sentenced to nearly six years in federal prison and was fined \$170,000. Then, weirdly, the ex-governor tried to withdraw his guilty plea. His

attempt went to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it failed. He served almost half his jail time, then returned to his Northern Panhandle home, Glen Dale. He appears occasionally at Republican events.

Moore was a charismatic figure with strong leadership ability — but his career ended in dismal disgrace.

Ironically, former U.S. Attorney Field, who failed in his 1976 attempt to imprison Moore, himself went to prison. After leaving Charleston, he opened a Virginia law office that helped stock swindlers sell worthless securities. Field got a two-year sentence.

*(Published Aug. 5, 2008)*

# Ned Chilton's many crusades

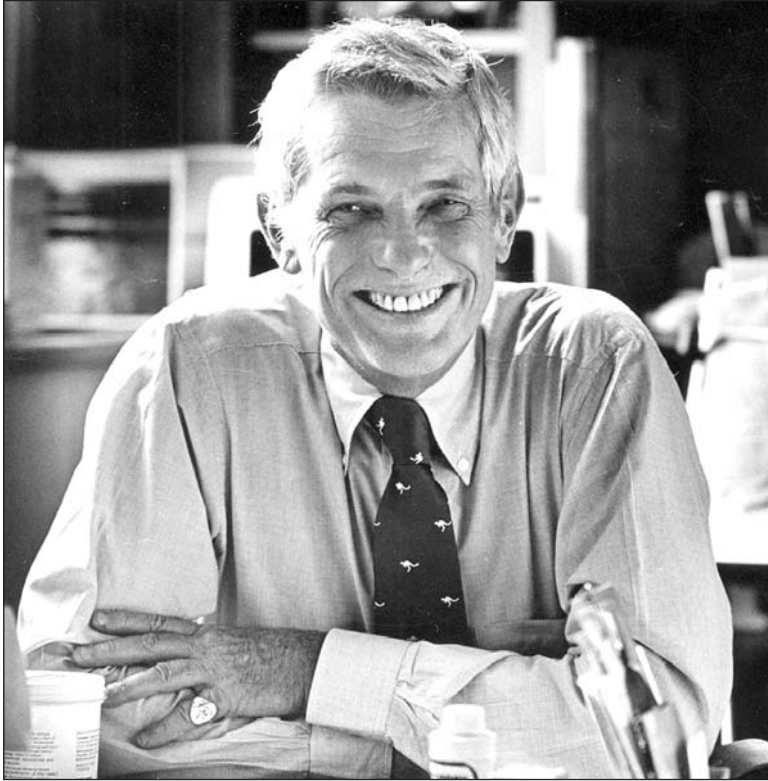
The *Gazette's* late publisher, William Edwin "Ned" Chilton III, died of a heart attack in Washington, D.C., in early 1987.

In mid-1988, the *Daily Mail* polled community leaders to determine the most influential people of the Kanawha Valley. Although Chilton had been dead a year and a half, respondents still ranked him a top mover-and-shaker — ahead of then-Gov. Arch Moore and gubernatorial nominee Gaston Caperton. Even in death, Chilton's impact on the region and the state was felt more strongly than that of living leaders.

In his long tenure as head of West Virginia's largest newspaper, the fiery publisher changed the state in many ways, through a perpetual blitz of reforms. In addition to reporting the news, he felt that every paper has a duty to keep government clean, push community causes, fight for the underdog, and champion human rights.

During the historic civil rights struggle, Chilton used the *Gazette's* editorial page to demand equality. He advocated racial integration of schools, hotels, restaurants, theaters, clubs, pools and all other facilities. Later, he pounded the state Human Rights Commission for dawdling over complaints of injustice.

Almost single-handedly, Chilton ended West Virginia's former "ghoul system," which let well-connected lawyers take a share from each dead person's estate. He pounded the practice until the Legislature created county probate clerks to process



*Gazette-Mail file photo*

**The *Gazette*'s late publisher, W.E. "Ned" Chilton III, was a cheery battler for human rights, and a foe of government corruption.**



wills and estate reports.

Chilton filed lawsuits that forced the State Bar and Board of Medicine to reveal complaints against lawyers and doctors. And he filed another that ended concealment of out-of-court settlements in suits against public officials. And he filed several that forced government boards and agencies to stop meeting in secret.

Chilton was the driving force in creating the consolidated Kanawha-Charleston 911 emergency communications center. He blasted balky city and county politicians who wouldn't cooperate, until they capitulated and joined the project.

### **Two decades against Moore**

But he was fiercer against shady politicians. He spent two decades trying to convince West Virginians that Gov. Arch Moore was too dishonest to be trusted with power. He wrote endless attacks on Moore's tainted actions. Chilton even recruited friends to help him buy full-page ads citing Moore's offenses. And he personally filed a legal ethics complaint seeking Moore's disbarment. Unfortunately, Chilton died before Moore finally was exposed, convicted, disbarred and sent to prison.

Chilton also sent investigative reporter Paul Nyden to Moundsville to examine a dubious polling business run by former Senate President Dan Tonkovich — and Tonkovich, like Moore, also went to federal prison.

### **'The insipid press'**

The aggressive publisher scorned newspapers that didn't hold public officials accountable. "The insipid press," Chilton called them. He denounced

northern West Virginia papers because they never asked former Rep. Robert Mollohan how he became a millionaire on his government salary.

When former Kanawha County Clerk Peggy Miller took the Fifth Amendment during an election inquiry, and was cleared of a misdemeanor charge — then demanded that taxpayers pay her inflated \$200,000 lawyer bill — Chilton raised a protest and eventually blocked payment of the tab.

Chilton ordered reporters to dig into abuses by stock promoters, evangelists, charity executives, plaintiff lawyers, termite exterminators, roofers, house siding salesmen, judges, insurance companies and car dealers. The last canceled \$100,000 worth of newspaper ads in retaliation.

Chilton clamored constantly for tougher laws against drunken drivers, who kill hundreds of people on West Virginia's corkscrew roads. He attacked cigarette makers, repeatedly warning of tobacco's death toll.

When a 14-year-old boy brought a pistol to Hayes Junior High School in St. Albans and killed a classmate, Chilton decreed that the killer's name be printed, in violation of a state law making it a crime to reveal juvenile arrests. The publisher, City Editor Don Marsh and police reporter Les Milam were indicted. They fought the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won. The West Virginia law was half-voided: Police still can't name young criminals, but newspapers can.

When the newspaper's exposures brought lawsuits, Chilton hatched a counter-tactic: He sued lawyers who filed baseless libel suits. For example, he forced former Charleston lawyer Stanley Preiser

to pay \$12,500 costs because Prieser had waged years of spurious litigation over *Gazette* reports of police corruption. Chilton gave the money to charity.

### **Sickened by racism**

Perhaps Chilton's deepest achievement was in promoting racial equality in West Virginia. He was sickened by racism, and sometimes recounted an event from his World War II Army days: Some U.S. soldiers were taking German POWs by train to a prison camp in a Southern state. The Germans were escorted into a railway depot restaurant to eat — but black GIs weren't allowed in, and had to wait on the platform.

Under Chilton, the newspaper clamored constantly for integration and equality in West Virginia. He applauded Gov. William Marland for enforcing the historic U.S. Supreme Court ruling against segregated schools, rather than rousing white opposition as some rural governors did. Formerly black West Virginia State College gave Chilton an honorary doctorate for his desegregation work. In 1984, he gave a lecture at the college, recounting the long civil rights struggle.

He mentioned that in the early 1950s, before the Supreme Court ruling, he enabled black high school athletes to compete in the *Gazette* Relays for the first time. He later demanded desegregation of public facilities — such as the white-only lunch counter at The Diamond department store. He said The Diamond's president angrily called him at home one evening to protest a *Gazette* attack.

"He asked the question, 'How would your wife like having her hair done in a beauty parlor also serving blacks?' I said, 'Wait a minute. I'll ask her.' So I asked her, and she said that prospect didn't bother

her, but if I didn't get off the telephone and get ready for a party to which we were invited, I would be in a lot of trouble."

Eventually, thanks partly to *Gazette* pressure, the Legislature outlawed such segregation in West Virginia.

Similarly, the *Gazette* supported sex education and women's right to choose abortion. It opposed the death penalty, censorship and the like.

These "liberal" pursuits caused former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to keep confidential files on the *Gazette* and Chilton. Using the Freedom of Information Act, the publisher unearthed the hidden files and printed them.

### **An instrument for truth**

After years of crusading, Chilton was chosen in 1982 for the national Elijah Parrish Lovejoy Award, named for a 19th century Illinois publisher who fought slavery so intensely that a mob burned his newspaper office and killed him. The award citation began: "You have fashioned your newspaper, *The Charleston Gazette*, into an indomitable instrument for truth...." The award was given by Colby College in Maine, which also gave him an honorary doctorate.

Chilton extended his assault on "the insipid press" to national media. In a speech to the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, he complained that most papers display mere "spurts of indignation.... We hit an issue and then pass on to something else. We show the attention span of a postal clerk."

Too many newspapers, he said, ignore the poverty suffered by millions of bottom-rung Americans and never criticize the self-enriching tactics of the upper crust.

“Our editorials too often sound like what they are: the voice of an extremely wealthy corporation that needs to be concerned about certain pressing problems.... We’re sitting on our mountains of money and our tremendous power, and we might just as well be silent for all the impact we’re having on our society.”

He added that the defense industry “has been screwing us 16 ways for the last generation,” and that Congress members use their privileges to keep themselves in power perpetually. He told the Southern publishers that every newspaper should vent “sustained outrage over basic injustices and fundamental idiocies.”

“Sustained outrage” became a Chilton slogan, reprinted in numerous national reports about him.

### **Not everyone’s favorite**

The publisher’s ferocious style caused some to denounce him. Gov. Moore dubbed the *Gazette* “The Morning Sick Call.” After the newspaper caught then-state Adjutant Gen. William Blake flying gambling operators to Las Vegas in an Air National Guard plane, Blake sent an Army tank rumbling through Charleston streets to aim its cannon at the *Gazette* office.

Blake later bought a Nitro weekly newspaper and attacked Chilton repeatedly. Blake sneered at Chilton’s World War II Army record, because the publisher had been only an enlisted soldier and once was tossed in a stockade. (After a *Gazette* column called Blake “a *Gazette*-hater of awesome intensity,” Blake reprinted the line as a motto on his paper’s masthead.)

Chilton was brash and confident, yet magnetic in many gatherings. He was elected four times to the



*Gazette* photo by Lewis Raines, Dec. 11, 1959

**After the *Gazette* revealed that a state Air National Guard plane flew illegal gambling operators to Las Vegas, the state's adjutant general sent this tank clanking down Hale Street to aim its cannon at the newspaper building. Printers waved surrender flags from upstairs windows.**

West Virginia Legislature in the 1950s, but stepped down after becoming publisher, feeling that his newspaper role required independence.

### **A voice for the people**

He was the heir of an affluent Charleston family which had owned the *Gazette* for generations. His grandfather was a U.S. senator and publisher. His father attended Yale and was publisher, in turn. The grandson likewise was educated at Yale. Yet he never wrote as a voice of the privileged class.

Not long before his death, *Grand Street* magazine ranked him among the rare few who are willing “to challenge the system that made them wealthy, or convey the idea that capitalism as presently practiced may have some serious defects.”

Chilton’s office wasn’t in the executive suite but in the newsroom, where he could grill reporters about ongoing battles. He often was at his video terminal seven days a week, jabbing out editorials with four fingers and growling at the screen.

He was 65 and vigorous when he died unexpectedly. Right to the end, he had continued hammering out more attempts to change West Virginia in ways he thought would help everyday people.

Today, his mark remains in West Virginia’s open-government laws, and in programs and facilities he championed. His legacy continued in the annual W.E. “Ned” Chilton III Leadership Lecture Series, designed to further his spirit of reform.

*(Published June 6, 1999)*



Charleston Police Department photo from Sgt. Ralph Johnson.

**Buying a drink (or a bottle, except at a state government store) was a crime in the 1950s. Police liquor raids against illegal bars and bootleggers were common. Here, “vice” officer Adrian McGinnis seizes hidden bottles from a suspect’s closet.**



# Morality evolved since 1950s

West Virginians in their 70s, like me, can look back and see that morality has evolved enormously in our lifetime.

When we were young in the 1950s, in various locales you could be jailed for buying a cocktail or lottery ticket — or for looking at the equivalent of a *Playboy* magazine or a sexy R-rated movie. Even writing about sex was censored. Charleston had police crackdowns on “obscene” books.

In those days, it was a crime in some states to sell birth-control devices. Elsewhere, buying a condom was hush-hush.

It was a felony to be gay. Homosexuals were imprisoned under archaic “sodomy” laws. One I remember jumped off the Dunbar bridge, rather than face trial.

Blacks were consigned to segregation, like Indians on a reservation. They weren’t allowed into Charleston’s white schools, restaurants, hotels, theaters, pools or neighborhoods. Mixed-race marriage was a crime.

Unmarried couples could be collared by cops for sharing a bedroom. No proper West Virginia hotelier would rent to a suspicious-looking pair.

An unwed girl who became pregnant was disgraced, along with her family.

Abortion was a prison offense, and desperate young women died of illicit termination attempts.

It was illegal for stores to open on the Sabbath.

Pregnant students were banned from Kanawha County high school classrooms, and sex education was denounced frequently.

Jews were excluded from “Christian-only” clubs, and started their own groups in West Virginia.

Women were excluded from a majority of occupations.

Divorce was unmentionable.

Of course, in the hodgepodge of life, there were exceptions to all those ‘50s strictures, and rebels against them. Bootleggers, hookers, bookies, free spirits and bawdy cynics existed. But law and officialdom were on the side of taboos. Does anyone remember when Mayor “Jumping John” Copenhaver sent police to bust Charleston bookstores for selling *Peyton Place*, drawing applause from clergy?

Buying a drink was a crime in those days, and police raids of illicit bars were common. Once, we young reporters were playing ping-pong in an upstairs room of the former Press Club when troopers stormed through. Food columnist Delmer Robinson told other ping-pongers: “See, I told you that serve was illegal.”

Today, a half-century later, morality has flipflopped. Unwed couples now live together openly with the blessing of their families. Children of single moms are welcomed like other kids. Blacks are guaranteed legal equality. Women’s job rights are assured by law. Gay sex no longer is a crime. Gambling isn’t merely legal — it’s run by the state. Sexual movies and magazines are so common they’re boring. Liquor clubs are everywhere. Sunday is a whopper shopper day.

How could morality change so much in a single lifetime? Why do most of us hardly notice the amazing transformation that occurred? Sometimes, when I recall the societal proscriptions of our youth, they seem unreal, lost in the mist of the past.

Come to think of it, morality obviously has been evolving constantly for millennia. There was a time when white Americans owned black Americans as human slaves — possessions like livestock — and it was deemed proper, legal and respectable. Today, the idea is monstrous, unthinkable.

In ancient Greece and elsewhere, unwanted girl babies were discarded in rubbish heaps to die. In the Old Testament, rules required stoning of non-virgin brides and execution of people who worked on the Sabbath. Clearly, values changed over time.

As for the past half-century, some evangelists and “virtues” crusader William Bennett clamor for a return to the “moral” 1950s. But I think it’s arguable that today’s values are considerably more honorable.

Here’s a tantalizing question: Since morality turned upside-down during the lifetime of today’s seniors, where is it heading right now, quietly unnoticed? What behavior and lifestyles will be casually accepted a half-century from now?

Will plural marriage be common? Will hard drugs be legal? Will public nudity be ordinary? Will children be raised communally? Or will a backlash occur, with values swinging back toward the prim 1950s?

I really can’t guess.

*(Published June 17, 2008)*



Gazette photo by Lawrence Pierce

**“Mothman” — popularized by this Point Pleasant statue and the community’s whimsical Mothman Festival — is part of West Virginia’s wacky lore.**

# Goofy tales swallowed by many

Well, the recent “Mothman” movie stirred thoughts about the eagerness of some people to believe nutty things.

Back in the 1960s, I wrote *Gazette* reports on the original Mothman craze. After Mason County witnesses reported a “man-size” bird with a 10-foot wingspan and glowing red eyes, I figured they had seen a huge crane in the night and gotten overexcited. But the Mothman tale was unstoppable. Ardent fans didn’t want an ornithological explanation. Speculation grew.

Flying saucer buffs — who flock to such bizarre happenings like, uh, moths to a flame — held a worldwide “Congress of Scientific Ufologists” at Charleston’s former Daniel Boone Hotel in June 1969. Sponsors said a Philadelphia mystic who communicated with “space intelligences” foresaw a wave of West Virginia UFO appearances during the session. But none occurred.

The ufologist meeting was held behind locked doors. The public wasn’t allowed to hear what I assume were startling revelations. I wrote that participants planned to discuss Mothman, and also discuss a Mason County couple who claimed they had been visited by many angels. In fact, the couple said they, themselves, had turned into angels. That was the last I heard of the angelic Mason countians. I wonder if they’re still around.

The Mothman craze was similar to the much-pub-

licized Braxton County Monster uproar during the same era. To cover that oddity, I drove to the rural town of Flatwoods (before it became a marketing complex on I-77) and interviewed people who said they saw a streak in the night sky and thought a meteorite had landed on a hilltop. They climbed the hill — and said they encountered a huge creature hovering in a tree above them. They fled in panic. They went on national television to recount their tale, complete with lurid pictures of the monster.

Recently, a UFO believer wrote a book saying ten flying saucers crash-landed all over West Virginia on the Braxton Monster night, and one of their occupants was the Flatwoods creature, but all the alien craft took off again successfully, which explains why no wreckage was found.

I mostly forgot this weird stuff. In fact, I was trying to ignore all dingaling topics, but someone sent me a book titled *The Abduction Enigma*. It says matter-of-factly that “between three million and six million Americans have been abducted” onto UFOs by space aliens who experimented on them. A Web site ([www.abduct.com/irm.htm](http://www.abduct.com/irm.htm)) offers to perform “alien implant removal and deactivation” for victims. The price is \$65 to remove implants inserted in your body by “gray” aliens, and \$95 to extract those of “reptilian” aliens. That’s a bargain, when you think about it.

I’ll offer a wager: If you concocted the most preposterous claim imaginable — say, that Mothman reappeared and told you to start a cult worshipping him — I’ll bet some followers would join your movement and give you money. The record contains plenty of corroboration.

**For example:**

■ The mystic Judy Knight “channels” the voice of Ramtha, a warrior who lived in Atlantis 35,000 years ago. Hundreds of believers flock to hear Ramtha’s revelations, and pay up to \$1,500 per session. Actress Shirley Maclaine says she wept with joy upon learning that she was Ramtha’s sister in Atlantis.

■ Members of the Heaven’s Gate commune believed that if they “shed their containers” (committed suicide), they would be transported magically to a UFO behind the Hale-Bopp comet. So they did it.

■ Some New-Agers proclaim that magical “Lemurians” live inside Mount Shasta in California.

■ Members of Japan’s “Supreme Truth” sect worshipped their guru so fervently that they kissed his big toe, paid \$2,000 each for a drink of his bathwater, and paid \$10,000 to sip his blood. At his command, they planted nerve gas in Tokyo’s subway to kill commuters.

■ Americans spend \$300 million a year on calls to psychic hot lines.

■ Armed militias out West contend that ZOG (the Zionist Occupational Government) is plotting to seize America for the Antichrist.

■ Science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard declared that planet Earth was an alien colony 75 million years ago, and troublemakers were exterminated by nuclear explosions. Their spirits, called “thetans,” became the souls of all humans. This assertion turned into Scientology, a billion-dollar religion that attracts Hollywood stars.

What does it mean that certain earnest, trusting

people are eager to believe astounding things — so much that they'll part with their money, or even their lives? It's baffling.

Personally, I've always admired pranksters who pull hoaxes to electrify True Believers. Such as British rowdies who sneak out at night, usually after a few pints, to make mysterious "crop circles" in fields. Or kindred spirits who fake photos of Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster.

Back when Mothman and the Braxton creature were hot topics, my cousin and I — young rene-gades — hatched a scheme. We had some brilliant reflectors that had been pried from posts of those old-time wooden guardrails along roads. We planned to attach two of them to eyeglasses frames to make gleaming eyes.

We plotted to hide among roadside trees at night, then step into the glare of approaching headlights, then run away — and wait for hysterical news reports about the glowing-eyed monster prowling West Virginia.

We never did it, which is just as well, because we might have caused wrecks. But I still relish the memory of our youthful scheming. If we had pulled it off, eager believers today probably would be recalling the mysterious visitor with gleaming eyes who haunted West Virginia, then vanished. Who knows, maybe it even would be a Mothman-type movie.

*(Published April 25, 2002)*



# The historic UMW cleanup

Back in the “smokestack era,” when industries needed armies of blue-collar workers, labor unions wielded great power. In those days, control of a union was important — enough, in one famous case, to cause crooked leaders to commit murder.

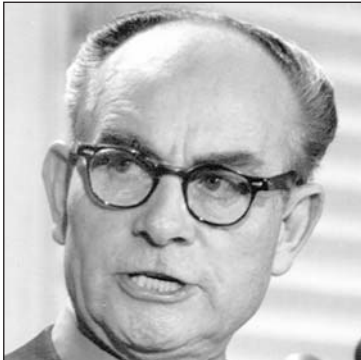
West Virginia was embroiled in that vile affair three decades ago. It triggered the heroic cleansing of the United Mine Workers, a historic reform crusade.

Before the cleanup, several developments showed that tyrannical UMW leaders under then-President Tony Boyle had betrayed miners and enriched themselves. Here’s the saga:

The terrible 1968 Farmington mine blast that killed 78 miners made it obvious that the UMW had done little about mine safety. I was at Consol’s smoldering Marion County mine the following day when Boyle — a dictator whose hand-picked appointees ran the union in many states — apologized for the mine owners, calling Consol “one of the better companies” and saying that “as long as we mine coal, there is always this inherent danger.”

Rebels in Congress, such as Rep. Ken Hechler, D-W.Va., clamored for a tough federal mine safety law. The *UMW Journal* — controlled by Boyle, often printing 15 photos of him in a single issue — sneered at Hechler, calling him a “fink.” But the drive for a new national safety law snowballed, and eventually succeeded.

Meanwhile, an odd trio of West Virginia physi-



**UMW President Tony Boyle**  
Convicted of murder



**Reform President  
Arnold Miller**  
Cleaned up the UMW



**Dr. I.E. Buff**  
Clarified black lung



**Dr. Hawey Wells**  
Helped reform crusade

cians — Dr. I.E. Buff of Charleston, Dr. Don Rasmussen of Beckley and Dr. Hawey Wells of Morgantown — declared that coal dust in mines causes a lethal disease: black lung. They gave fiery speeches at miner rallies. The colorful Dr. Buff waved a plastic bag containing a ruined lung. Other authorities denied their claim, saying such lung problems stem from cigarettes (which is partly true, since smoke paralyzes bronchial filaments that eject foreign particles like coal dust).

UMW leaders were silent about the issue. But Arnold Miller, a war-scarred miner from Cabin Creek, organized colleagues into the West Virginia Black Lung Association and demanded a state law for medical compensation. In early 1969, they drew 3,000 miners to a Charleston Civic Center rally. Reform crusader Ralph Nader sent a message saying “Tony Boyle has neglected his responsibility to protect coal miners.” Rep. Hechler waved a large bologna as a comment on opposition claims. Legislators Paul Kaufman and Warren McGraw spoke. (Boyle reportedly vowed to cram the bologna down Hechler’s throat.)

A wildcat coal strike began, and soon turned into a statewide mine shutdown by 43,000 strikers. A second Civic Center rally was held, and thousands of miners marched on the Statehouse. Some shook their fists and jeered as they passed the UMW district headquarters on Kanawha Boulevard. They engulfed legislators, who passed the state’s black lung law. The strikers refused to return to work until then-Gov. Arch Moore signed it into law.

(The protest included a coffin on wheels, which

was left in the rotunda at the Capitol. One night, after too much partying, a news reporter climbed into the coffin, and another wheeled him around the hallways.)

Determined to oust the corrupt Boyle leadership, Nader asked a Pennsylvania UMW leader, Joseph “Jock” Yablonski, to run for UMW president. A union history book later said Yablonski replied: “If I do run, Ralph, they’ll try to murder me” — but Nader insisted: “Oh, they wouldn’t dare.” Yablonski consented, with disabled miner Elmer Brown of Mingo County as a running-mate. Arnold Miller’s group, calling itself Miners for Democracy, backed the Yablonski-Brown ticket fervently. A bitter campaign was waged.

In many West Virginia appearances, Yablonski accused the Boyle team of treachery and embezzlement of union funds. In Congress, Hechler hammered at Boyle’s “tyranny.” More than 50 West Virginia retired miners and widows joined a federal suit saying the Boyle administration had bilked them of union health benefits. Other court actions challenged the one-man rule which filled state and local UMW posts with appointees, not elected officers.

During the campaign, Miller, Buff and a few other rebels sometimes told me they feared assassination by the Boyle camp. We news reporters smiled privately, thinking their alarm was overblown melodrama. We were wrong.

The union election was Dec. 9, 1969. Yablonski lost, but refused to concede, and asked the U.S. Labor Department to investigate for vote fraud. Three weeks later, on New Year’s Eve, killers went to his Pennsylvania home and shot him, his wife and their

daughter, a graduate student at nearby West Virginia University.

The murders were like a dam-burst that washed away the corrupt UMW leadership. The fallout was relentless:

Almost immediately, three petty criminals — two from West Virginia — were charged with the murders. They were caught because Yablonski and a friend had written down the license number of a car that came to the Pennsylvania home previously.

The West Virginians had long records of two-bit crime and drunkenness. One had shot his wife, but wasn't prosecuted. Evidence emerged that they had stalked Yablonski for months, and once tried to shoot him while he was riding in a car with Hechler from Logan to Huntington, but the curvy road thwarted them. A statement said one of the West Virginians stank so bad that the other plotters could hardly bear to ride in a car with him.

The killers were convicted, then regional UMW officials were charged with paying them. Prosecutors relentlessly pushed the investigation up the ladder toward the masterminds.

Meanwhile, In early 1972, the retired miners and widows won their lawsuit, and the union was forced to restore \$11.5 million to the health-and-retirement fund.

Later in 1972, a different judge ruled that the appointment system by which Boyle had filled all union posts was illegal. Rep. Hechler called it "another blow for freedom and decency on behalf of working coal miners."

Then courts ruled that the union election had been rigged, and ordered new balloting in late 1972.

Miller became the second challenger, backed by his rebel group. He won — and his new regime brought openness, local union elections, and integrity to the union. It was a landmark cleanup, rising from the Mountain State. Miller was named the *Sunday Gazette-Mail's* West Virginian of the Year in 1973. He died in 1985.

Boyle, first charged with embezzling union money, eventually was convicted with eight others in the Yablonski murders. He died in prison, also in 1985.

When the whole drama was just beginning, a young reporter from the Jack Anderson column came to Charleston. His name was Brit Hume. I took him to meet the reform leaders. Hume wrote a book titled *Death and the Mines: Rebellion and Murder in the UMW*. Today, he's an anchor of the right-wing Fox News network.

Unions were a big force in those days, when West Virginia still had 50,000 miners. But only 13,000 remain today, and many of them are nonunion, earning large incomes and voting Republican.

The era when unions were important enough to spawn murder plots is over.

*(Published March 22, 2005)*

# Laid-back life in the hills

While big-city people hide behind triple-locked doors and fight commuter stampedes, there's a lot to be said for life in the slow lane in rural West Virginia.

I went home to Wetzel County for the Shortline Reunion, and the old magic got me again.

Lush green hills with the first yellow splotches of autumn.

Lazy creeks threading corkscrew valleys. Fields blazing with goldenrod.

I reached my brother's hilltop farm at night, and moonlight made glimmering lakes of the fog in valleys below. Pure poetry. On moonless nights, the Milky Way glows like a broad belt across the dark sky.

There's a gentle simplicity to life in the sleepy towns and roadside clusters. My hometown, Reader, is so sleepy it's nearly comatose. The old wooden house where I was born, the post office where my father was postmaster 40 years, the creeks where we caught water snakes — it all might seem tacky to anyone else.

People living beside the country roads have a sense of belonging, an identity with the land. In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig told of cruising in the country and envying families by back roads. "The whole pace of life and personality of the people who live along them are different," he wrote. "They're not going anywhere. They're not too busy to be courteous. The hereness and nowness of things is something they know all about. It's the oth-



*Gazette-Mail file photo*

**Lovely reflections in Elk River at Blue Creek convey the serene quality of peaceful life in wild, wonderful West Virginia.**

ers, the ones who moved to the cities years ago and their lost offspring, who have all but forgotten it.”

One of the hills near Reader is called Slim Chance. I never knew why. A ridge is called Chiselfinger. Naming every hollow, every bend, even the major pools of the creek, is a way rural folk personalize their region.

From Parkersburg north to New Martinsville, then east through the hills, little has changed in a half-cen-



ture. A plant here and there, a few shopping malls, satellite TV dishes and discount-store swimming pools — they're new, but incidental.

The rest of America is being urbanized into free-ways and high-rises, but West Virginia's ruggedness is a natural barrier to congestion. Even as more development comes, the hills will remain a sanctuary of low-key life.

The Shortline Reunion is named for the old Shortline Railroad from New Martinsville to Clarksburg. It's for all graduates of all years from three country high schools — Reader, Pine Grove and Smithfield — that no longer exist, replaced by consolidated Valley High. There were 13 in my graduating class.

At the reunion banquet at Pine Grove (in the Robert C. Byrd Community Center, naturally), grizzled grandparents recalled teen-age pranks, circa World War II, and told each other about their life journeys. Noticeably, all the former farm youths seemed to have done well. Hill people are hardy and diligent.

On the return trip, I saw multitudes of Canada geese at a roadside lagoon, and lunched at a park where barefoot children squealed and romped.

In the newspaper business, we focus on the horrors of Bosnia and Rwanda, the hopelessness that bred the Los Angeles riots, the danger that forces metropolitan schools to have metal detectors and armed guards.

It's reassuring that a secure and placid life prevails through much of this state. People still climb hills with their children and dogs. Whippoorwills still make their sad call at night.

*(Published Sept. 20, 1994)*

*Fascinating West Virginia*



*Gazette-Mail* file photo

**Charleston Vice Squad leader Robert Crouse hid from news cameras during his trial in the police payoff scandal. He drew three years in prison.**

# Police payoffs caused a storm

Back when vice was illegal — instead of run by the state government — Charleston suffered a tempest over allegations that shady gambling operators, bootleggers, brothel madams, numbers runners, pimps, bookies and other sin-sellers quietly slipped money to a few police officers, to buy protection from arrest. As a *Gazette* reporter, I was entangled in the 1970s mess.

It began when Kanawha County's chief deputy, Howard Parks, surreptitiously gave me two confidential reports he had compiled for prosecutor Pat Casey. One listed 54 Charleston clubs and taverns where illegal vice was known. The other quoted a Beckley numbers king as saying he paid \$800 a month to a Charleston officer for freedom to sell illicit lottery slips in the capital city.

The late Capt. Lawrence Morris, an outsider to the dominant clique of the Charleston force, also fed me payoff tips and steered me to witnesses. I prowled the city's underside, talking with seedy characters straight out of *The Threepenny Opera*.

Cautiously, the *Gazette* printed some of the allegations, without naming officers suspected of taking bribes. Immediately, Chief Dallas Bias, vice squad leader Bob Crouse and another vice detective filed million-dollar libel suits against the paper.

Bias resigned to run for mayor, and Van Brown became acting chief. Brown suspended Crouse and the second officer. They demanded civil-service hearings. Witnesses against them vanished. The vice

detectives were reinstated, and filed bigger libel suits. The *Daily Mail* said a murder contract reportedly was issued for Brown. Chief Deputy Parks said death threats were made against me, so he sent a deputy to watch my home at Lake Chaweva. My dogs barked at him all night.

Casey said evidence was too thin for payoff indictments. Another officer related to the inquiry, Don Wandling, left the force.

Witnesses began dying. Morris, promoted to chief, said a young woman, Barbara Spaulding, told him of payoffs in a midtown brothel. She later was found shot to death in the restroom of a West Side café, and a pistol was in a wastebasket eight feet outside the door. Also, the madam of the brothel was convicted of stabbing her lover to death.

Freeland Winnell gave the *Gazette* an affidavit saying he paid police so his wife could work as a prostitute. But his reliability vanished when he shot her to death in a Summers Street bar. He went to prison.

Other witnesses disappeared from Charleston. Bias died on his pleasure boat — reportedly after he was told that an officer had been offered immunity to sing.

The newspaper amassed a large file of evidence. One out-of-state newsman sent us a hilarious letter about staying at the Daniel Boone Hotel while covering a story. He said a bellman sent whiskey and a hooker to his room — then a policeman burst in and tried to extort money from him. The paper's publisher, W.E. "Ned" Chilton III, was so amused that he read the letter to friends at parties.

James "Mike" Roark, an aggressive young U.S. lawyer on a Pittsburgh strike force, came to

Charleston and launched a federal grand jury probe. Crouse was indicted. At his 1974 trial, his ex-girlfriend testified that she had accompanied him to joints to pick up money.

A defense witness was W. Kent Carper, a young lawyer and state securities commissioner, who had cruised Charleston's underside with Crouse. He testified that the officer seemed honest—but the jury found otherwise. The vice chief got three years in prison.

All the libel suits against the *Gazette* were tossed out of court. Publisher Chilton, who hated frivolous lawsuits, countersued and forced the cops' lawyer to repay the newspaper's defense costs.

Roark later became county prosecutor with Carper as his top aide. Then Roark became Charleston mayor with Carper as his police chief. Then Roark went to prison for cocaine use, was released, became a professional actor, helped lead an organization against the death penalty, studied to be an Episcopal priest, and died of leukemia at 53. Today, Carper is a dynamo of the Kanawha County Commission. Local events can be such a tangle.

Wandling, the officer who quit the force, later was jailed for tax evasion, counterfeiting and other crimes. Crouse got out of prison, became a private detective, helped save a young Sissonville man wrongly accused of murder, and died of a stroke at 57.

Since many former "sin" laws were taken off the books, Charleston has far less illicit vice today. I'm glad the state legalized liquor joints and assumed control of gambling, taking rackets away from bottom-feeders who once slipped money to police.

*(Published Dec. 20, 2005)*



*Gazette* photo by Frank Wilkin, July 11, 1961

**“Axis Sally” (Mildred Gillars) was freed from the federal women’s prison at Alderson after serving 11 years for treason during World War II. At left are Roger Mudd of CBS News and former Gazette Editor Don Marsh.**

# Famous female felons in West Virginia

Down in West Virginia's rugged southeast corner, Alderson is a pleasant mountain town on the Greenbrier-Monroe line. It has 1,086 population and various old-timey buildings. Crime is low and life is tranquil.

Alderson usually doesn't attract much notice — but occasionally it grabs a world spotlight, because it's the temporary home of many of the world's most notorious women, housed in America's first federal prison for females.

When lifestyle queen Martha Stewart is released after serving five months for lying about an insider stock deal, she's sure to be swamped by TV crews and other news-chasers. Big-name women convicts often draw throngs of reporters, both upon arrival at Alderson and departure.

I joined the swarm once, in 1956, when "Tokyo Rose" was freed after serving six years for treason. Dozens of national newsmen converged at the campus-like prison. I rode in a car with columnist Jimmy Kilgallen, who paid an Alderson family to reserve its telephone for his exclusive use in transmitting a report to the world the moment the World War II traitor walked out.

Actually, the "traitor" was a gentle little Japanese-American woman who smiled to the waiting mob and rebuffed harsh questions. "I've been out of circulation a long time, boys," she evaded. She got in a car with family members and drove west, pausing for

breakfast at a South Charleston restaurant, then leaving West Virginia.

It turned out she wasn't a traitor, after all, and she wasn't even Rose. Here's her tale:

Iva Toguri was born in California in 1916 and earned a zoology degree from Compton Junior College in June 1941. Soon afterward, she went to Japan to tend a sick aunt. Then she was trapped by the eruption of war — while her family in California was ordered into an internment camp. Her mother died on her way to the lockup.

Japanese officials branded Toguri an enemy alien and forced her to work. One of her jobs was as a typist at a radio station, where she reportedly joined several other women reading English-language broadcasts to American GIs on islands around the Pacific. Some broadcasts taunted the soldiers, telling them their wives at home were unfaithful, and the like. GIs dubbed all the women Tokyo Rose.

At war's end, U.S. occupying forces in Japan jailed Toguri as a traitor, but a military investigation cleared her. It was learned that she had helped American POWs in Japan during the war. However, flag-waving columnist Walter Winchell and others clamored for new prosecution. She was brought to California, narrowly convicted and sent to Alderson.

In the 1970s, other news reporters proved that Toguri was innocent, that she had been convicted on bogus testimony. President Gerald Ford gave her a pardon and national apology. The last I heard, she was living in Chicago, nearly 90 years old.

Through the years, various other infamous females have done time at Alderson, and have drawn notice.



Several decades ago, Charleston had a socialist bookstore that organized a “Free Lolita Lebron” campaign. It plastered Charleston with posters saying the woman was a political prisoner at Alderson, jailed only because she wanted independence for Puerto Rico.

Well, I checked — and learned that she had shot Congress members in the back. In 1954, she led two male conspirators into a visitors gallery of the House of Representatives. She unfurled a Puerto Rican flag, shouted “Vive Puerto Rico Libre,” and all three opened fire with pistols. Five congressmen were wounded.

*The Washington Post* reported that Lebron saw blazing visions of Jesus every night in her Alderson room. She built an altar and became a mystic. She became the oldest prisoner at Alderson, and finally was given a clemency release by President Carter in 1979. An old woman, she roamed Puerto Rico, evangelizing everyone she met.

Some other Alderson celebrities:

■ Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme (who reportedly got her nickname because she squeaked when a vile old man groped her) was part of California’s drugged-out Charles Manson cult, but wasn’t involved in the gory 1969 murders that sent five cult members to prison. In 1975, outside the California statehouse at Sacramento, she attempted to kill President Gerald Ford with a .45-caliber automatic, but couldn’t make it fire. She escaped from the Alderson prison in 1987, was caught two days later, and was sent to a Texas lockup.

■ Charleston native Sarah Jane Moore, who had

five husbands and four children, got into radical California politics in her 40s. Just 17 days after the Fromme attempt, Moore also tried to shoot President Ford outside a San Francisco hotel, but a bystanding man grabbed her gun after one shot. Ford did little to thank the man, because reports said he was gay. In 1979, Moore also escaped from Alderson, was recaptured, and was sent to a California prison.

- Sandra Good, another Manson cultist, was convicted in 1976 of threatening to kill 75 corporation chiefs, and served a while at Alderson.

- “Axis Sally” was the World War II nickname of Mildred Gillars. A Maine native, she grew up in Ohio, moved to Germany in 1935, became an English teacher, and was hired by Radio Berlin as a commentator and actress. She signed an oath of allegiance to the Hitler regime and made wartime English-language broadcasts taunting U.S. and British soldiers. She reportedly made anti-Semitic slurs. After the war, she was convicted of treason and served at Alderson until 1961. Then she earned a degree at Ohio Wesleyan College and died in 1988 at age 87.

- Kathryn Kelly, wife of 1930s gangster “Machine Gun Kelly” (and considered the brains of the criminal pair), served at Alderson until her release in 1958.

- Blues singer Billie Holiday was incarcerated at Alderson in 1947 for heroin addiction.

- Old-time Communist-Socialist-labor organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union, was jailed during the McCarthy witch hunts for supporting leftist causes.

After release in 1957, she wrote a book titled *The Alderson Story: My Life as a Political Prisoner*. She died in Moscow in 1964 and was given a state funeral in Red Square.

■ Pacifist Clare Hanrahan of North Carolina was jailed for trespassing at the Army's School of the Americas, which trained military operatives for right-wing Latin American dictatorships. She served six months in 2002, and later wrote a book titled *Jailed for Justice: A Woman's Guide to Federal Prison Camp*.

Compared to these wild women, Martha Stewart seems a bland home decorator.

*(Published March 3, 2005)*



*Gazette-Mail file photo*

**Rare sight on Kanawha River at Charleston is this graceful sloop on a summer afternoon.**

# Boats in the boondocks

When I see 12-meter yacht racing or 60-footer off-shore cruising, I'm embarrassed to call myself a sailor.

But when I'm out on a lake in a beloved old dingy, skimming silently on the free power of nature, I'm Lief Ericson, I'm Christopher Columbus, I'm the Polynesian explorers, I'm the Nile boatmen in their feluccas, I'm Chesapeake Bay oystermen in their Skipjacks, I'm Albert Einstein on Saranac Lake, I'm Jack Kennedy off Hyannis Port, I'm Ted Turner winning the America's Cup — I'm everyone who ever felt the joy of flying with the wind over sparkling water.

Real sailors — oceangoing sailors — probably smile indulgently at us boondocks boaters, who ply our little boats on skinny lakes and rivers between the mountains of Appalachia. But that doesn't matter. We're hooked, regardless.

In West Virginia, 62,000 pleasure boats are licensed — but only a few of them are sailboats, probably around 1,000. Most sailors have craft like my Force Five and Flying Scot, which lack motors and don't need licenses.

One reason that Appalachia has few sailors is because mountain country is the worst for sailing — no wide bays, no constant winds, no traditional yacht clubs or regattas. Still, we make do with what's available.

West Virginia has 93 public lakes, about half of them large enough for sailing. Biggest is

Summersville Lake, at 2,700 acres. Close behind is the new Stonewall Jackson Lake near Weston, with 2,650. It features the newest state park, with 374 boat slips — testimony to the growth of boating.

Other major West Virginia lakes: Bluestone in Summers County (2,040 acres); Tygart, Taylor County (1,750); Cheat, Monongalia County (1,730); Sutton, Braxton County (1,500); Mount Storm, Grant County (1,200); East Lynn, Wayne County (1,005); Burnsville, Braxton County (968); Jennings Randolph, Mineral County (952); and Beech Fork, near Huntington (720).

The 10 largest are operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which reports six million visitors a year, counting all picnickers, anglers, swimmers and campers.

The state also has hundreds of miles of navigable rivers, dotted with marinas.

The river rat in *The Wind in the Willows* said “There is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.” Plenty of messing about happens in Appalachia.

On many of these waters, we sailors ply the no-wake zones or out-of-the-way inlets, to avoid the choppy wakes churned up by power craft. At a few places, the roaring jet-set is no problem.

My favorite getaway spot is Beech Fork Lake, a lovely retreat 10 miles south of Huntington. It’s a jewel of a nature haven, frequented by deer, geese and huge cranes that look like hang-gliders. The Corps of Engineers forbids outboard motors larger than 10 horsepower, so there are only fishermen’s john-boats and a flotilla of meandering pontoon craft.

The entire lake is a sailboat playground. When I feel more adventurous, I take my larger boat to bigger Cave Run Lake, near Morehead, Ky.

Gliding lazily on an Appalachian lake, I'm often struck by the perfection of gravity. Hills rise and fall all around, but the water surface strikes an absolute level through the jumble.

Sailors know a special thrill of being close to nature, competing with the elements. We trick the wind and water into yielding a noiseless, graceful, free ride that seems much faster than it is. A sailboat "comes alive" in a breeze and requires skillful handling to attain speed and control — always with the risk that a flub will dunk the craft and the boaters. (I once capsized nose-first at Beech Fork, like a submarine in a crash dive.) The stronger the wind, the more the crew hangs over the side, riding the edge of excitement like occupants of a roller-coaster.

Amazing physics is involved. The curved sail, tight in the wind, becomes an airfoil like an airplane wing. Air traveling over the outside of the curve goes farther, hence faster, and has lower pressure (according to the Bernoulli Principle, which says fast-moving gases have less pressure). Higher pressure behind the sail shoves forward — and the dagger-board or keel below prevents sidewise slippage. That's why a boat can sail partly toward the wind.

But sailors don't need to know physics. They just need to understand a few operating rules, and they're off. I got hooked in middle age. I bought an 11-foot boat in a yard sale for \$450, thinking it might be fun for my four children to use at the small private lake where I live, near Charleston. The kids were

bored — they prefer slam-bang sports — but I tried it and was enchanted.

Later I sold the 11-footer, called a Max, and bought a used Force Five (named for a category in the rating system for storm winds) for \$500. It's a 14-footer almost like a Laser. Still later, I added a wonderful 1959 Flying Scot, a 19-footer big enough to hold a dozen grandkids and chums, for \$1,500. Small-boat sailing is economical. Sailors tend to spend a pittance, then feel superior to power boaters in their \$20,000 craft.

Now I use both boats: the little Force Five on my home lake, and the Scot for trips to bigger waters. Both have planing hulls that skim the top of waves as speed increases. When sunlight is glistening on the ripples, and a planing boat is sending out a spray that glints in the sun, you ride a million sparkles. I hope to ride those sparkles as long as I live.

Sailing is a sort of poetry. In *Proverbs*, Solomon ranked it among these marvels:

“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.”

*(Published May 22, 2005.*

*Previously published in Heartland Boating and Small Craft Advisor)*



# Backwoods talk is a hindrance

Some people think Appalachia's mountain dialect is charming, and they have a point.

But when the hill accent is combined with mangled grammar — “He hasn't came home yet” or “I done it yesterday” — I cringe, because I worked hard to overcome that stigma.

The little Wetzel County farm town where I grew up in the 1930s had no electricity, paved streets — or proper English.

We all said “poosh” for push, “boosh” for bush, “weesh” for wish, “feesh” for fish, etc. Color was pronounced “collar.” After dinner, women would “red up” the table. They “warshed” clothes in tubs with hand wringers. Get was always “git.”

Farmers who rode their horse wagons to the post office where my father was postmaster would scan the sky and say: “I 'low it's gonna rain.” Later, I realized this was a hill version of “allow.”

Neighbors across the street gave their baby daughter a fancy French name, Yvonne. They and everyone in town pronounced it “WYE-vonne.”

My dad called this country “Ameriky.” We boys skipped flat stones on the “crick” and hunted squirrels up the “holler.” Rural preachers denounced “sins of the flersh.” Usually, “right here” came out “rat cheer.”

People in my town were intelligent. They simply used the language that surrounded them.

(Renowned British biologist Richard Dawkins says

growing tots mimic the speech around them so perfectly that New Yorkers easily can tell which borough a person is from.)

In the 1950s, when I became a cub reporter, sophisticates in the *Gazette* newsroom made fun of my Gomer Pyle twang and hillbilly dialect. I became self-conscious and practiced diction. A society reporter (in those days, that was the only newswriting role for women) patiently taught me that “special” isn’t “spayshul” and “from” isn’t “frum.” She also taught me to hold a knife and fork without flailing my elbows. She became my wife.

Here’s the weird part: As I slowly learned to speak acceptable English, I found myself looking down on folks who sounded the way I did a few years before. That’s bizarre, I thought — I’m prejudiced against my old self.

But it’s a fact of life: Educated people who speak correctly have low regard for those who don’t. Ungrammatical speakers are seen as low-I.Q., unfit for work requiring keen minds. Job applicants who sound like backwoods hicks usually are considered only for menial work.

Worst of all are syntax-manglers who tell fellow workers “He has already went home” or “He don’t work here anymore.” And the common “just between you and I” annoys knowledgeable folks.

Our Sunday paper spotlighted grammar problems in West Virginia. These articles had a single purpose: to remind families that good jobs require good language. People who speak poorly get less respect, and are less likely to be hired.

Maybe it’s snobbish, but it’s universal. That was

the theme of George Bernard Shaw's great play, *Pygmalion* and the *My Fair Lady* musical drawn from it. Eliza Doolittle was actually quite intelligent, but her crude Cockney talk limited her to being a street peddler, unsuitable for higher social orders — until Professor Henry Higgins showed her that good language brings upward mobility.

I don't want to belittle my mountain heritage, but it's undeniable that proper grammar and diction are required for good careers in the new Information Age.

Sometimes, after a hard day's work or a couple of beers, I slip subconsciously, and the old Wetzel County dialect blurts out. It's always a surprise — and I quickly squelch it.

(Published Oct. 9, 2001)



*Gazette photo by Chris Dorst*

**Although West Virginia has two-to-one Democratic registration, the state cast its electoral votes for Republicans George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in 2000 and 2004. The 2008 nominee, Senator John McCain, greets supporters at a St. Albans store proclaiming guns and salvation.**

# Are DINOs turning W.Va. red?

Obviously, West Virginia has many DINOs, Democrats in name only.

For the 2004 general election, the state's registration stood at 680,464 Democrats and 349,193 Republicans, nearly a 2-to-1 margin. Yet the presidential vote was 418,347 for Republican George W. Bush and 322,716 for Democrat John Kerry, almost a 100,000-vote drubbing.

Clearly, tens of thousands of Mountain State Democrats chose the GOP candidate. Why on earth did they prefer a smirking, self-righteous president who started the unnecessary Iraq war on false grounds, who plunged America horribly into debt via trillion-dollar tax giveaways to the rich, and who did nothing as corporations sent millions of U.S. manufacturing jobs overseas?

Before a single vote was counted on that 2004 election night, the Associated Press reported that Bush had carried the state. The accurate forecast was based on exit interviews with 1,700 West Virginians leaving precincts. "Nearly half of all voters identified themselves as evangelical or born-again Christians," the AP wrote, adding that Bush was backed by "those with ardent patriotism and conservative social values such as opposition to abortion and gay marriage."

In other words, those voters cared less about needless war, lost jobs and giveaways to the rich than they cared about Bible Belt beliefs. Besides

opposition to abortion and gays, the latter usually include support of school prayer, Ten Commandments displays, gun-carrying, the death penalty, censorship of sexy TV shows, etc. (Nobody seems to notice that these goals have nothing to do with Jesus.)

Presumably, this mentality helped swing West Virginia's electoral votes to Republican Bush in both 2000 and 2004. The looming question is: Will it draw West Virginia farther into the GOP camp of "red states" in coming years?

This and related topics were debated at a forum hosted by the state's organization of political science professors. I was among panelists at the event titled "Red and Blue West Virginia: The Evidence For and Against."

I've observed West Virginia for more than half a century, and I decided long ago that the state's huge Democratic majority is partly an illusion. Great numbers of mountain Democrats think like Republicans. Some examples:

In America's two-party political system, the clearest dividing line deals with abortion. The Democratic platform says: "We stand proudly for a woman's right to choose." The GOP platform says: "The unborn child has a fundamental, individual right to life, which cannot be infringed." The only way to guarantee the latter is to make abortion a crime again, which would require jailing of women who choose to terminate pregnancies, plus doctors and nurses who help them.

Many West Virginia Democrats embrace the GOP position. Democrats in the Legislature usually vote to restrict women's choice as much as possible.

Democratic Gov. Joe Manchin is a hero to the state's abortion-fighting organizations, like other major Democrats. Among the party's politicians, only the left-wing fringe attends pro-choice events.

While America as a whole supports choice, West Virginia ranks among a handful of "socially conservative" states opposing it. Survey USA says 56 percent of Americans are pro-choice and only 38 percent pro-life — but these numbers are roughly reversed in the Mountain State, as well as in places like Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Utah, etc. Significantly, the same states continue showing higher approval ratings of Bush, although his luster has dimmed everywhere.

Another clear distinction between the political parties involves homosexuality. The Democratic platform says: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation." But the GOP platform pledges to defend "that unique and special union of one man and one woman."

Again, West Virginia Democrats think Republican. Progressives in the Charleston council expanded the city's "hate crimes" law to protect gays from beatings — but most Democrats in the Legislature wouldn't dream of doing the same with the state hate crimes law. Fundamentalist churches would explode. When the Huntington council tried to follow Charleston's lead, conservative congregations mobbed the chamber, and council members retreated.

Another distinction involves pistol-carrying. The Democratic platform advocates several safeguards against gun murders, but the Republican plank champions bearing arms and opposes federal gun licensing.

Overwhelmingly, rural West Virginians support gun-carrying. Although most state Democratic politicians pose as gun-lovers, many mountain folks suspect that they're soft on the issue, and vote Republican because of it.

During the 2004 campaign, "God, guns and gays" was the blanket explanation of why multitudes of West Virginia Democrats leaned to the GOP. That's simplistic — but accurate, I think.

Dixie once was a land of DINOs. A half-century ago, the "Solid South" had overwhelming Democratic registration — but few genuine Democrats. Most southern whites held hidebound conservative beliefs. Slowly, they switched political alliance, and now the South is solid Republican.

Is West Virginia moving along Dixie's path? Or will the Mountain State's preponderance of working-class families swing West Virginia's presidential loyalties back to the party that aids average folks?

*(Published Oct. 6, 2005)*

**ADDENDUM:** Democrat-dominated West Virginia remained a GOP "red state" for a third consecutive time in the 2008 presidential election, giving its five electoral votes to the Republican ticket of John McCain and Sarah Palin.



# Robert C. Byrd's evolution

Back in 1959, when I was press aide to Sen. Robert C. Byrd in Washington, I never dreamed that he would evolve into my hero.

The 1950s were a different world, a time of undisguised prejudice, racial segregation, censorship taboos and other puritanical strictures. The *Gazette* had denounced Byrd for belonging to the hate-filled Ku Klux Klan. In those days, I considered him just another self-hustling mountain politician who preached in rural churches and played his fiddle at campaign rallies, catering to white Appalachian narrowness.

But multitudes of West Virginians liked him. He was elected three times to the Legislature, then three times to the U.S. House of Representatives. Klan allegations hounded him, but voters shrugged them off. In 1958, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, and needed more staff.

I had been bored, endlessly tending the *Gazette's* city desk until midnight. When Byrd offered more than double my newspaper salary, I brushed aside my uncertainties and moved to Washington. The vision of lounging in the Senate cloakroom with Jack Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Everett Dirksen and the like dazzled me.

Capitol Hill life is a charade. Staff aides are lackeys who hover at the elbows of Congress members, doing everything possible to make them look leaderly. I lasted only seven months. I got an ulcer, gained 30 pounds, and fled back to the *Gazette's* wonderful



Associated Press photo from *Gazette-Mail* files

**A mighty gavel was wielded by Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., when he became U.S. Senate majority leader. Smiling behind him is Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif.**

chaos.

My apprehensions about Byrd seemed justified a few years later when he fought against equality laws and staged a 14-hour filibuster against the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

But slowly, as decades turned, a remarkable change developed. Byrd grew in stature and wisdom, steadily distancing himself from the mountain prejudices of his boyhood.

His long seniority moved him higher in Senate power, and he began funneling millions in federal projects and jobs to West Virginia. He became the state's best economic development machine. (The late *Gazette* Editor Don Marsh argued that Byrd's home-state boons "aren't pork-barrel." I replied, "Oink, oink — bring 'em on.")

This newspaper named Byrd West Virginian of the Year in 1974, then again in 1977, and a third time in 1990. He deserved it each time.

But he didn't reach hero status with me until 2002, when he became almost a lone-wolf voice against President Bush's clamor to invade Iraq. While most of Congress timidly sat mute, Byrd showed great courage as he stood time after time to warn that the White House was dragging America into a senseless, unnecessary, harmful war.

The Bush clique said Iraq possessed horror weapons and was in bed with terrorists who would unleash them on Americans. Byrd said there was no evidence to support this claim — and it turned out that he was correct.

The Bush clique said Iraq's people would greet U.S. troops as liberators, and that Iraq's own oil

wealth would pay America's military costs. Byrd said this prediction was nonsense — and it turned out that he was correct.

His eloquent Senate speeches were mostly ignored by the Washington news media, but many Americans began savoring them and distributing them by e-mail. They spread around the world, reaching millions of people. Some of us in the *Gazette* newsroom almost cheered as we read his bold attacks on the warmongers. The speeches later were reprinted in Byrd's book, *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency*.

The *Gazette* named him West Virginian of the Year a fourth time in 2002, and again he deserved it.

Byrd became so aged and feeble that he barely could walk. Yet he seemed like a lion to me in his brave resistance to the smirking, shallow president.

It took nearly a half-century for me to see him as a genuine hero.

*(Published June, 29, 2010, the day after Byrd's death.)*



A hiker crosses a ravine near Blackwater Falls.  
Gazette photo by Kenny Kemp.

# Lovely forest, dark and deep

West Virginia has a marvelous asset that part of the public ignores, but a significant group cherishes.

It's the lush forest covering nearly 80 percent of this state - the most dominant feature, along with the mountains.

For woods-lovers, the forest is an enticing lure that's freely available, almost everywhere you look. West Virginia is engulfed in nature, with countless shady trails along deep ravines or winding among tall trees that rise like pillars of a cathedral. Woodland is a place of spiritual contentment, a quiet refuge for

calm reflection and long thoughts. It feels like being in church. And forest trekking is healthy, good for fitness as well as inner peace.

For seven decades, I've been hiking the Mountain State's woods. I even make my own trails around Lake Chaweva and other fringes of Charleston. Along my personal paths, the groves and rock formations become private retreats, known like the back of my hand.

When I enter the forest, usually with a companion dog, serenity takes over. Dappled sunlight glimmers and moves with breezes. Silence prevails, except for soft rustling. Wildflowers and ferns sprinkle the forest floor. Far above, the treetop canopy is like a green awning. Squirrels scurry. Deer often appear. Turkeys are rarer. Once I saw a bobcat in Webster County. I've visited beaver ponds in Canaan Valley and near Beech Fork Lake.

Beloved poet Robert Frost said "the woods are lovely, dark and deep," and he was correct.

Trees seem timeless, because their life-and-death cycle is extremely slow. Some cliffs have ancient seashells embedded in rock layers, showing that these hilltops once were ocean floors, long before humans began. They impart a sense of eternity even greater than the lives of trees. Thousands of generations of people have come and gone while those outcrops stood silent.

For years, I hiked with Kanawha Trail Club, often amid the tall timber of Kanawha State Forest. When I grew too old to keep up with the tough veterans, I returned to solitary exploring, mostly with my three-legged boxer. Recently I cleared a path from the Oakridge Drive hilltop through stately woods along an old logging road down to the Kanawha-Charleston animal shelter. It's beautiful.

Hiking through other people's woodland is legal in West Virginia. The state trespass law (Code 61-3B) is hospitable. Unless property is fenced, cultivated or posted with regular signs, anyone may wander at will through open woods. It's completely free and unsupervised. Good hikers are responsible guests, never littering, and even picking up any rubbish.

West Virginia is ideal for forest-lovers. This state has America's highest ratio of hardwood timber, covering 12 million of



the state's 15.4 million acres. Maine and New Hampshire have slightly higher percentage of woodlands, but theirs is mostly evergreens. West Virginia has 47 state parks and forests, plus two national forests and 93 public lakes - most with hiking trails and campsites. As the coal industry shrinks, abandoned spur railways are being converted into free public rail-trails. Even rest areas along interstate highways have small hiking trails.

Hundreds of West Virginia volunteers, groups and agencies cherish the forest as I do and work to make it more hikeable. The state Trails Coalition mapped a statewide master network of around 150 public forest paths, or "linear parks," as it calls them. The group hopes to "make West Virginia the 'trails destination' of the eastern United States." The Nature Conservancy welcomes hikers to its 17 Mountain State preserves and landscapes. Outdoors enthusiast Leonard Adkins wrote a book titled *Fifty Hikes in West Virginia*. The state Scenic Trails Association sponsors the 300-mile Allegheny Trail from Preston to Monroe counties. Many other organizations serve the forest, with volunteer crews tending trails.

Besides all the official designated pathways, endless opportunity for outdoor escape lies in the woods that surrounds nearly every neighborhood.

When my four children were young, we had our own tent-and-campfire site for overnight outings in hills behind Lake Chaweva. One of our trails went directly through a split in bizarre stones we called the Enchanted Rocks. I told children and grandchildren that fairies dance on the formation at night, but they didn't believe me.

We held numerous weenie roasts at another huge rock formation reachable only by a long hike. I've left final instructions: When the time comes, I want my ashes sprinkled around that rock edifice, so I'll have the largest tombstone in West Virginia. There's no better place to end up than in the green sanctuary covering four-fifths of this state.

As Washington Irving wrote: "There is a serene and settled majesty in woodland scenery that enters into the soul, and dilates and elevates it, and fills it with noble inclinations."

(Published July 18, 2009)

# Epilogue — Love of the hills

June 20 is West Virginia Day, commemorating the 1863 landmark when President Abraham Lincoln created a loyal northern state from the western mountains of rebellious, slaveholding Virginia in the midst of America's worst tragedy, the Civil War.

This holiday stirs many feelings, from memories of Yankee sympathies that caused mountaineers to break from the South, to the wistful attachment West Virginians share for the hills of home.

Napoleon said, "Mountaineers always love their country," and most West Virginians agree. The upended topography and nearness of nature become part of each native's psyche.

Each June 20, for the state's birthday, *The Charleston Gazette* reprints various quotations that reflect strong feelings about West Virginia. Here are some of them:



"Summon every energy of your mind and heart and strength, and let the traitors who desecrate our borders see, and let history in all time record it, there was one green spot — one Swiss canton — one Scottish highland — one county of Kent — one province of Vendee — where unyielding patriotism rallied, and gathered, and stood, and won a noble triumph."

— *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 30, 1861,  
by **Editor Archibald Campbell**, urging mountaineers to split  
from seceding Virginia and remain loyal to the North





"This was no land for lily-fingered men, who  
bowed and scraped and danced a neat quadrille....  
Our state was whelped in time of strife, and cut its  
teeth upon a cannonball."

— From *Rhymes of a Mountaineer*  
by **Roy Lee Harmon**, West Virginia poet laureate



"Rippling mountain streams that glisten in my  
dreams  
Peaceful valleys that I used to roam  
When the dusk is falling, I hear the bob-white call-  
ing  
in my West Virginia home.  
Green hills in the spring, a bluejay on the wing  
rhododendrom blooming everywhere  
Gentle folks who greet you like old friends when  
they meet you  
There's no place that can compare."

— From *West Virginia's Home to Me*,  
a song by former *Daily Mail* Publisher **Lyell Clay**



"Whether or not mountaineers were always free,  
they were almost always poor."

— **John Alexander Williams**, *West Virginia*, 1976



"Rough mountains rise all about, beautiful in their  
bleak ugliness.... Yet they have their moods. On gray  
days they lie heavy and sullen, but on sunny morn-  
ings they are dizzy with color.... They are gashed  
everywhere with watercourses, roaring rivers, bub-  
bling creeks. Along these you plod, a crawling  
midge, while ever the towering mountains shut you

in. Now and then you top a ridge and look about.  
Miles and miles of billowing peaks, miles and miles  
of color softly melting into color....”

— **James M. Cain**, author of *The Postman Always Rings  
Twice*, writing in 1923 in *The Nation*  
as he covered the West Virginia mine war

■ ■ ■

“In mountains there is freedom. The Earth is  
perfect everywhere, except where man comes with  
his torment.”

— **Friedrich Schiller**, German poet (1759-1805)

■ ■ ■

“This is a desolate place — steep hills dotted with  
tiny shacks and rows of coke ovens, rising straight  
from the wicked, wicked river, full of rapids.”

— Poet **Edna St. Vincent Millay**, letter to her husband  
as she traveled to Charleston in a 1924 reading tour

■ ■ ■

“Where the mountain river flows  
and the rhododendron grows  
is the land of all the lands....”

— From *Hill Daughter* by **Louise McNeill Pease**,  
West Virginia poet laureate

■ ■ ■

“Here is hard-core unemployment, widespread  
and chronic; here is a region of shacks and hovels  
for housing; here are cliffs and ravines without stand-  
ing room for a cow or chickens. In this region of  
steep mountains, a person is exceptionally fortunate  
if he is able to hack out two or three 10-foot rows of  
land for potatoes or beans.”

— **Erskine Caldwell**, describing Mingo, McDowell and  
Wyoming counties in *Around About America*, 1964

“Oh the green rolling hills of West Virginia  
are the nearest thing to heaven that I know.

Tho’ the times are sad and drear, and I cannot  
linger here  
They will keep me and never let me go.”

— From *The Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia*,  
a song by **Utah Phillips**

■ ■ ■

“A place where all you need to be is what you  
are... A past that in the present somehow makes you  
feel secure.”

— *Leaving West Virginia*, a **Kathy Mattea** song

■ ■ ■

“On the map, my state is probably the funniest-  
looking state in the Union; it resembles a pork chop  
with the narrow end splayed.”

— **John Knowles**, in the West Virginia volume of *Holiday*  
magazine’s American Panorama series, 1960

■ ■ ■

“The state is one of the most mountainous in the  
country; sometimes it is called the ‘little Switzerland’  
of America, and I once heard an irreverent local citi-  
zen call it the ‘Afghanistan of the United States.’ ”

— **John Gunther**, describing West Virginia in  
*Inside USA*, 1947

■ ■ ■

“Almost heaven, West Virginia... I hear her voice, in  
the morning hours she calls me. Radio reminds me of  
my home far away. Driving down the road, I get a feel-  
ing that I should have been home yesterday...”

— From *Country Roads*, by **Bill and Tammy Danoff**,  
popularized by singer **John Denver**

“There is never peace in West Virginia because there is never justice. Injunctions and guns, like morphia, produce a temporary quiet. Then the pain, agonizing and more severe, comes again. So it is with... Medieval West Virginia!... With all its grim men and women; When I get to the other side, I shall tell God Almighty about West Virginia.”

— Labor organizer **Mother Jones**, in her autobiography, quoted by **Eve Merriam** in *Growing Up Female in America*

■ ■ ■

“You might be considered a West Virginian if... (1) Your front porch collapses and more than six dogs are killed... (2) Less than half the cars you own actually run... (3) Your diploma contains the words ‘Trucking Institute’... (4) Your wife’s hairdo has ever been caught in a ceiling fan... (5) You have a rag for a gas cap... (6) Your brother-in-law is also your uncle.”

— The late *Gazette* humorist **James Dent**

■ ■ ■

“I am the hills. I will sing your song.... There is a permanence about my people, and strength. For hands that tamed a wilderness cannot die....”

— From *Sing, Appalachia*  
by West Virginia poet **Muriel Dressler**

■ ■ ■

“In the dead of the night  
In the still and the quiet  
I slip away like a bird in flight  
back to those hills....”

— From *West Virginia, O My Home*,  
a song by **Hazel Dickens**, a Mercer County native.

“O the West Virginia Hills, how majestic and how  
grand, with their summits bathed in glory....”

— From *The West Virginia Hills*,  
one of three official state songs



“There is music in the flashing streams  
and joy in the fields of daffodils  
And laughter through the happy valleys  
of my home among the hills.”

— From *My Home Among the Hills*,  
another official state song



James A. Haught was born in a small Wetzel County farm town and graduated from a rural high school with 13 students in the senior class. He came to Charleston, worked as a delivery boy, then became a teen-age apprentice printer at the *Charleston Daily Mail* in 1951.

Developing a yen to be a reporter, he volunteered to work without pay in the *Daily Mail* newsroom on his days off, to learn the trade. This arrangement continued until *The Charleston Gazette* offered a full-time news job in 1953. He has been at the *Gazette* ever since — except for a few months in 1959 when he was press aide to Sen. Robert Byrd.

During his half-century in newspaper life, he has been police reporter, religion columnist, feature writer and night city editor — then he was investigative reporter for 13 years, an assignment that led to several corruption convictions. In 1983 he was named associate editor, and in 1992 he became editor. He writes more than 400 editorials a year, plus occasional columns and news articles.

Haught has won 20 national newswriting awards, and is author of nine books and 70 national magazine articles. He also is a senior editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Contemporary Authors*. He has four children, 12 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

# Mountain State tales

- A plantation owner's devotion for his beloved slave woman eventually produced the state's largest African-American community, Institute.
- The historic Kanawha County rebellion against "godless textbooks" made world news.
- The Portuguese wine fraud snared savvy bankers and investors.
- Infamous corruption of the Barron and Moore administrations filled prison cells.
- "Deathwind" Lewis Wetzel tracked and killed Indians.
- The "pot plane" crash jolted Charleston — and the zany drug smugglers later won an Academy Award.
- Romney changed hands 56 times during the Civil War.

Varied topics like these have been covered for a half-century by *The Charleston Gazette's* veteran editor. His tenure in the news business is so long that Gazette artists depicted him covering a cabinet meeting of the president who created West Virginia.



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